8 years ago

Let us tell the story of a certain man.

The tale of a man who, more than anyone else, believed in his ideals, and was driven to despair by them.

The dream of that man was pure.

His wish was for everyone in this world to be happy; that was all that he asked for.

It is a childish ideal that all young boys grow attached to at least once, one that they abandon once they grow accustomed to the mercilessness of reality.

Any happiness requires a sacrifice, something all children learn when they become adults.

But that man was different.

Maybe he was just the most foolish of all. Maybe he was broken somewhere. Or maybe, he might have been of the kind we call ‘Saints’, entrusted with God’s will. One that common people cannot understand.

He knew that for any existence in this world, the only two alternatives are sacrifice, or salvation…

After understanding that, he would never be able to empty the scale plates…

From that day on, he set his mind to work on being the one to tip the scale.

To abate the grief in this world, there was no other, more efficient way.

To save even one life on one side, he had to forsake one life on the other side.

That is, to let the majority of people survive, he had to kill a minority of people.

Therefore, rather than saving people for the sake of saving them, he excelled at the art of killing people.

Again, and again, he kept painting his hands the color of blood, but the man never flinched.

Never questioning the righteousness of his acts, nor ever doubting his goal, he forced himself to only faultlessly tip the scale.

Never ever misjudging the value of a life.

With no regard to the humility of one’s existence, and with no regard to its age, all lives were weighed evenly.

With no discrimination, the man saved lives, and, with no discrimination, he killed.

But unfortunately, he realized that too late.

To value everything in equal fairness, that would be the same as not loving anyone uniquely.

Had he carved that inviolable rule into his spirit sooner, he would have attained salvation.

Freezing his young heart into necrosis, achieving his self as a measuring machine with neither blood nor tears, he kept on leading a life of sorting those that were to die, and those that were to live. There probably wasn’t any suffering for him.

But that man was wrong.

Anyone’s delighted smile would fill his chest with pride, and anyone’s wailing voice would shake his heart.

Anger was added to his resentment, and he became full of regrets as his tears of loneliness longed for hands reaching out to him.

Even though he was pursuing an ideal beyond reason of the world of men — he too, was human.

How many times was the man punished for that contradiction?

He did know friendship. He did know love.

Even when putting that one beloved life, and the countless number of perfect strangers, on the left and right of the scale—

He definitely never made a mistake.

More than loving someone, to judge that life equally to that of the others, he had to value it impartially, and impartially forfeit it.

Even when he was with someone precious to him, he would always seem to be mourning.

And now, the man is being inflicted with the greatest punishment.

Outside the window, a snowstorm has frozen everything. A mid-winter night is congealing the ground of a forest.

The room is in an old castle built on frozen soil, but it is protected by a gentle flame burning in the fireplace.

In the warmth of that shelter, the man was holding one new existence in his arms.

It was a really small one — a body so tiny, it could be ephemeral, and no weight that could tell it was ready.

Even a delicate response can be dangerous, as with the first snow scooped by hand, which would crumble with a mere jolt.

In frail eagerness, the child preserves her body temperature by sleeping, breathing leniently. That is all that the modest throbbing of the chest can do at the moment.

“Don’t worry, she’s sleeping.”

As he lifts the baby in his arms, the mother, resting her body on the couch, smiles upon them.

From the haggard look of the child, she isn’t fine yet, and her complexion isn’t perfect, but even so, her beautiful face reminiscent of a jewel doesn’t decline in any way.

Above all, the color of bliss brightens her smile and erases the exhaustion that should have worn out her gentle look.

“She would always be difficult and cry, even with the nurses she should have gotten accustomed to. It’s the first time she’s let herself be held so quietly… She understands, doesn’t she? That it is fine because you are a good man.”

“…”

Without answering, dumbfounded, the man compares the mother on the bed with the child in his arms. Had Irisviel’s smile ever looked that dazzling?

She originally was a woman of little happiness. Nobody would have thought of giving her that feeling called happiness. She wasn't a creation of Gods; she was created at the hands of men… As a homunculus, such a treatment was normal for that woman. Irisviel had never had any wish.

Created as a puppet, brought up as a puppet, maybe she never even understood the meaning of happiness to begin with.

And now — she is beaming.

"I'm really glad I had this child."

Quietly bringing forth her love, Irisviel von Einzbern spoke, watching over the sleeping child.

"From now on, she will be first and foremost an imitation of a human. It may be tough, and she might hate the mother who gave her such a painful life. But, despite that, I am happy. This child is lovely; she is splendid."

Her appearance is nothing unusual, and, looking at her, she is a lovely baby, yet —

While inside the mother's womb, a number of magical treatments were conducted on the unborn body to rearrange it so that, even more than her mother, she was different from humans. Although it was born, its usefulness was restricted, so that it would be a body that is a mere cluster of magic circuits. This is the true nature of Irisviel's beloved daughter.

Despite such a cruel birth, Irisviel still said, "Fine." Giving birth to such a thing, being born as such a thing, she loves this existence, finds pride in it, and smiles.

The reason for that strength, that bracing heart, was that she was, without a doubt, a "Mother".

The girl who could only be a puppet found love and became a woman and found an unswayable strength as a mother. That must have had the look of a "happiness" that nobody could invade. Right then, the bedroom of the mother and child protected by the warmth of the fireplace was indifferent to all despair and sorrow.

But — the man knew better. That to the world he was part of, the snowstorm outside the window was the most appropriate.

"Iri, I —"

By firing one single word, the man's chest felt like it was pierced through by a blade. That blade was the peaceful, sleeping face of the baby and the dazzling smile of the mother.

"I will be, someday, the plight that will kill you."

As he felt like vomiting blood, Irisviel nodded with a peaceful expression to his declaration.

"I understand. Of course. That is the earnest wish of the Einzberns. That is what I am for."

That was the future that was already decided.

After 6 years had passed, the man took his wife to her dying place. As the one victim to save the world, Irisviel had become the sacrifice devoted to his ideal.

That was a matter that had been discussed several times between the two, and on which they had come to an agreement.

The man had already cried his heart out at that decision, cursed himself for it, and each time, Irisviel had forgiven him, and encouraged him.

"I know your ideals, and I grew attached to your prayers; that is why I am here now. You guided me. You gave me a life that wasn't that of a puppet."

For the same ideal, she sacrificed herself. She had become a part of him like that. So was the shape that took the love of the woman Irisviel. Because it was her, the man was able to permit it.

"You don't need to grieve over me. I am already a part of you. Enduring only the pain of your own sundering is enough."

"… So, what about her?"

The infant's body was light as a feather, yet a weight of a different dimension made the man's legs shiver.

He couldn't understand yet, nor was he prepared for, what he would inevitably do when placing that child against the ideal he carried.

Don't judge or forgive such a man's way of life. There isn't the power for that yet.

But, even with such a pure life, his ideal is merciless.

With no regard to the humility of one life, and no regard to age, all regarded evenly —

“I am…not fit to hold her.”

The man squeezed out his voice, despite having his sweetness likely to be crushed in insanity.

One tear drop fell on the plump, cherry colored cheek of the baby in his arms.

Sobbing silently, the man bent on one knee.

To overthrow the heartlessness in the world, he aspired to a greater heartlessness… And yet, to the man who still had people he loved, that was finally being inflicted the greatest punishment.

His most loved one in this world.

Even if it meant the ruin of the world, he wanted to protect that.

But the man understood. The time would come when the justice he believed in would demand the sacrifice of such a clean life — what kind of decision would this man, Emiya Kiritsugu, make?

Kiritsugu cried, scared of that day that might come, frightened by that one in a thousand chance.

Holding his chest tighter in the warmth of his arms, Irisviel raised her upper body from the bed and gently placed her hand on the shoulder of her husband who burst into tears.

“Never forget. Wasn’t it your dream? A world where nobody would need to cry like that. Eight more years… And your battle will be over. We will carry out this ideal. I’m sure the grail will save you.”

His wife, fully understanding his agony, caught Kiritsugu’s tears as kindly as possible.

“After that day, you must hold that child, Ilyasviel, once more. Stick out your chest as a normal father.”

3 years ago

When we speak about occultism, theories on dimensions say that there is a 'power' from outside this world.

Pinpoint the beginning of all things. That is the dearest wish of all magi, the 'root', ... The place of God, Akashic Records, the records of the beginning and the end of all things that creates everything in this world.

200 years ago, there were those who put into execution experiments on that place 'outside of this world'.

Einzbern, Makiri, Tōsaka. Called the 3 families of the beginning, what they designed was the reproduction of the 'Holy Grail', the subject of many traditions. Expecting that the summoning of the Grail would realize any wish, the three families of magi offered their secret art to finally manifest the 'omnipotent container'.

... However, that Grail could only grant the wish of one person. As soon as that truth was known, the bonds of cooperation were washed in blood by conflicts.

That is the beginning of the 'War of the Holy Grail', 'Heaven's Feel'.

Henceforth, once every 60 years, the Grail is summoned again in the far-East land of 'Fuyuki'.

Then, the Grail selects 7 magi who have the power to take it, and distributes a huge amount of prana among them, to render possible the summoning of Heroic Spirits called 'Servants'. The conclusion of a battle to the death decides which of the seven is most suitable to receive the Grail.

— To put it simply, that is what Kotomine Kirei was undergoing.

"The pattern that has appeared on your right hand is called the 'Command Seals'. It is the proof that you are chosen by the Grail, and the holy mark that grants you the right to control a Servant."

The person with the smooth but carrying voice who explained this was Tōsaka Tokiomi.

In the room of an elegant villa built atop a small hill in the neatest district in the south of Turin, Italy, 3 men sat on a lounge chair. Kirei and Tokiomi, and the Father who introduced them and mediated the conversation, Kotomine Risei... Kirei's actual father.

For the friend of a Father who would soon reach 80, that Tōsaka was an eccentric Japanese. He did seem to be around the same age as Kirei, settled

and with the presence of an expert. From the lineage of an old distinguished family even by Japanese standards, this villa was his secondary residence, as he said. But the most interesting was that he would casually declare himself as a 'magus'.

Being a magus isn't such a strange thing as it may sound. Kirei was, as his father, a clergyman, yet the duty of the father and son greatly differed from what ordinary people know of a 'Father.'

The 'Holy Church' that people like Kirei belonged to have a doctrine that was outside the bounds of miracles and divine mysteries but would bear the role of exterminating the stigma of heresy and burying it into oblivion. That would be, taking a standpoint from where they could supervise a blasphemy such as magecraft.

Magi conspire with magi only and are organized in a self-preserving group that calls itself the 'Association', which presents a threat as a rival to the Holy Church. At the present time, they have both agreed to preserve a temporary tranquility; but even so, a state of affairs where a Father from the Holy Church and a magus would gather in the same building for a lecture would be unthinkable.

As for the case of Risei, the father, the Tōsaka family was one to which the Church already has old connections, despite being a house of magi.

It was the previous night that Kirei had discovered the surfacing pattern shaped in three marks. He had then consulted his father, and Risei had immediately taken his son to Turin the next morning to meet that young magus.

From then, after a hurried greeting, the explanations Tokiomi had given to Kirei in this secret meeting were concerning the same war, 'Heaven's Feel'. The meaning behind the mark that had appeared on Kirei's hand... That is, the product of Kirei acquiring the privilege to dispute the chance of getting his desire by a miracle through the fourth recreation of the Holy Grail that was to happen three years later.

Not that he would refuse to fight. Kirei's duty in the Holy Church was, in essence, direct removal of heresy, meaning he was a fully-fledged combatant. You could say that it was his very duty to wager a life-and-death bet against a magus. Rather, the problem was the contradiction that it required Kirei, a clergyman, to participate as a 'magus' in the Heaven's Feel that was a dispute between magi.

"The thing about the Heaven's Feel is that it is a battle that uses Servants as familiars. So, to keep on going forward, the elementary magecraft for the

summoning itself becomes required. …Essentially, the seven persons who are selected as Masters of the Servants have to be magi. It must be exceptional for someone like you, who doesn't make a living out of magecraft, to be recognized by the Grail at such an early stage."

"Does the Grail have preferred people to select?"

Tokiomi nods to the yet-unconvinced Kirei.

"I mentioned the '3 families of the beginning' — for the granting will favor the magi related to the Makiri, who have now changed their name to Matō, the Einzbern, or the Tōsaka houses. In other words,"

Tokiomi lifted his right hand to show the threefold pattern.

"As the current head of the Tōsaka family, I will participate in the next battle."

Then, was this man planning to cross arms with Kirei after having kindly guided him so thoroughly? Although Kirei couldn't comprehend that, he carried on with his numerous questions.

"I wonder about the Servants you mentioned earlier. Heroic Spirits summoned and used as familiars, you said..."

"It may be hard to believe, but that is the fact. That could be the one wonder of this Grail."

The legends of great men, super humans who have left their name in history and folklore. They are those who remained in the permanent memory of men after their death and were taken out of the category of mankind, promoted even in the spiritual realm; they are 'Heroic Spirits'. Those are on a whole different status from the vengeful spirits or common evil spirits from nature that the magi usually summon as familiars. So, to speak, it is an existence with the spiritual status of a god. Although a part of that power can be brought out and borrowed, it is unthinkable that they would be used as familiars in the present world.

"If you consider that making this impossibility possible is the power of the Grail, you understand how outrageous a treasure it is. In the end, even the summoning of a Servant is but a mere fragment of the power of the Grail."

As if to say that he himself was dumbfounded by what he was saying, Tōsaka Tokiomi sighed deeply and shook his head.

"Heroic Spirits from between the ancient age of gods up to at best a century ago can be summoned. Seven Heroic Spirits follow seven Masters, each protecting their own Master and exterminating the enemy Masters. Heroes from any era and country are summoned into the present era and would meet in a deadly competition for supremacy. That is the Holy Grail War of Fuyuki, Heaven's Feel."

"... Such a monstrosity? In a place where thousands of citizens live?"

All magi follow the common idea of hiding themselves. It's the one obvious way to go in this era that believes science to be the sole universal truth. Revealing their existence is definitely impossible when we take the Holy Church into consideration as well.

But you would have to conceal a power that can bring a catastrophic disaster with Heroic Spirits. Using seven Servants in a conflict between humans in the present era and have them clash together... It is practically the same as ordering a slaughter of massive caliber in a war.

"— Of course, it is implicitly understood that the confrontation must be held in secret. You need a well-prepared supervision to make sure of that."

Having remained silent until then, Kirei's father, the priest Risei, came forward and voiced his part.

"The Heaven's Feel happens every 60 years, and this time will be the fourth. The civilizing of Japan had already begun when the second War occurred. Even in the most remote places, we cannot ignore people witnessing the spreading of serious damages.

Then, since the third Heaven's Feel, an agreement has been made so that we at the Holy Church would dispatch a supervisor. To reduce the disasters from the War to a minimum, we must conceal its existence and have the magi comply to keeping the feud secret."

"Does the Church serve as a referee in a conflict between magi?"

"Precisely because it is a conflict between magi. There is no one in the Magi's Association who is fit as a referee because of political implications. There simply wasn't any way other than having recourse to an external authority such as the Church.

In addition, it was just not possible for our Holy Church to let the name of the Holy Grail be used lightly to begin with. We can't ignore the possibility that it really is the cup that received the blood of the son of God, either."

Both Kirei and Risei, father and son, have a place in the section called the Assembly of the 8th Sacrament. A duty of that group in the Holy Church is to recover control of holy relics. The treasure called the Holy Grail appears in many tales and legends, and the importance of the 'Grail' in the doctrine of the Church is particularly large.

"Under such conditions, last time, in the chaos of the World War, a meeting was held at a suitable time regarding the third Heaven's Feel and I, then a youngster, was appointed an important task. For the next battle, I would proceed to the land of Fuyuki to watch over your fight."

At the words of his father, Kirei could but tilt his head.

"Please wait. Isn't the chosen Church supervisor expected to be fair? It is a problem if a participant is a blood relative... "

"There, there. You would think this is a blind spot of the rules?"

The unusual smile of the stubborn father was implying something that Kirei could not read.

"Kotomine-san, you shouldn't trouble your son. Let's move on to the real question."

Tōsaka Tokiomi explicitly urged the old priest to the point.

"Hm, right. — Kirei, all we have explained was only about the 'outward aspects' of the Grail War. There is another reason I had you meet Mr. Tōsaka today."

"... Which is?"

"To tell the truth, we have had a positive proof since long ago that the Grail that appeared in Fuyuki was a different one from the holy relic of the 'son of God.' In the end, the battle in the Heaven's Feel of Fuyuki is only fought for a treasure that is a mere copy of the omnipotent container, one that opens a way to a utopia. It is in no way related to our Church."

That's how it is. Otherwise, the Holy Church would not be content with just the role of a silent supervisor. If the Grail turned out to be an actual 'Holy Relic', the Church would bypass the cease-fire agreement and plunder it out of the hands of the magi.

"If the final goal of a chalice is only a means used to reach the Akashic Records, it is none of our Holy Church's concern. Afterall, the craving of

magi to find the 'Akasha', the origin, does not necessarily conflict with our doctrine.

— Though, to allow ourselves to leave it alone, we need to pass it to a strong person. If an unwelcome fellow got around it, we don't know what kind of accident might be caused."

"Then, if we eliminate it as a heresy —"

"That is still difficult. The magi who confront for the Grail have an uncommon tenacity. If we were to conduct a frontal trial, a conflict with the Magi's Association would be inevitable. And that would create too many victims.

Rather, as the second-best plan, there would be nothing more interesting than finding a way to entrust it to a 'desired person'."

"... I see."

Kirei was gradually catching up to the true motive of this interview since his father was intermingling with Tōsaka Tokiomi, a magus.

"Since they have been oppressed by the faith of their native land, the Tōsaka family has followed the same doctrine as ours. Knowing Tokiomi-kun's character, he himself is guaranteed to qualify for the use of the Grail."

Tōsaka Tokiomi nodded, then resumed speaking.

"Reaching 'Akasha'. There is no greater purpose than this to us Tōsaka. But, sadly, the Einzberns and Matōs, who once shared the same motive, have lost track of it to more worldly matters, and have now totally forgotten their original intention. I won't even mention how they have invited four master’s from the outside, as well. They want the Grail for their despicable lust and nothing else."

That would mean that the Holy Church would approve of no one else but Tōsaka Tokiomi as the bearer of the Grail. So Kirei understood more about his assignment.

"So, you would like me to participate in the next Grail war to let Mr. Tōsaka Tokiomi win?"

"That's it."

Finally, Tōsaka Tokiomi showed the first sign of a smile.

"Of course, we will join forces under the surface against the five remaining Masters, and annihilate them, to increase the chances of victory."

At Tokiomi's words, Father Risei gives an austere nod. The neutrality of the Holy Church as a referee was already turning to a farce. This Heaven's Feel must be interesting, taking into concern the original expectations of the Church.

As for that, it was neither good nor wrong to Kirei. If the intentions of the Church were clear, there was only the fulfilling of his task as one devoted executor.

"Kirei-kun, you will be transferred from the Holy Church to the Magi's Association, and you will become my apprentice."

Without a break and with a practical tone, Tōsaka Tokiomi hastened his explanations.

"A — transfer?"

"The exchange has already been made formal, Kirei."

Saying this, Father Risei took out a letter. It was a notification with the joint signatures of both the Holy Church and the Magi's Association and was addressed to Kotomine Kirei. Kirei was more than surprised at the merit of the performance: from the day before to today, the letter had been taken care of immediately.

In the end, there really was no real purpose of acting up in the matter for Kirei, nor had he any particular reason for taking offense at the discussion. For Kirei had no purpose at all.

"The important thing will be to have you do nothing but practice magecraft in my house in Japan. The next Heaven's Feel is in 3 years.

By then, you must have a Servant that obeys you, and become a magus who will participate in the battle as a Master."

"But — is it alright? If I openly study under you, won't there be any doubts that we are working together?"

Tokiomi gave a cold-hearted smile and shook his head.

"You don't know about magi. If their interests collide, a conflict between a teacher and his student ending in a battle to the death is a common occurrence in our world."

"Ah, I see."

Though Kirei didn't mean to understand about magi, he had a good grasp of the tendencies of the race called magi. He had had countless occasions to compete with 'heretical' magi as an executor. The number of people that he had brought down with his own hands isn't in the tens or twenties.

"So, do you have other questions?"

As Tokiomi requested for a conclusion, Kirei asked the question he had had since the beginning.

"Only one — The Grail that selects the Masters, just what is its purpose?"

Apparently, that was really not a question Tokiomi expected. The magus' eyebrows gathered in a wrinkle for a short while, then he gave a relaxed reply.

"The Grail will... Of course, it will preferably select masters who sincerely need it.

As I said earlier, us Tōsaka will be included at the top of that list as one of the original 3 families."

"So, all of the masters have a reason to want the Grail?"

"It isn't limited to that. The Grail requires 7 persons to show up. If not, enough people turn up at the present time, irregular people who would normally not be chosen can carry Command Seals. There might have been such a case in the past, but — Ah, I see."

While speaking, Tokiomi seemed to realize what Kirei was suspicious of.

"Kirei-kun, you think you shouldn't have been selected, don't you?"

Kirei nodded. No matter how hard you would search, there was no reason for a wishing machine to notice him.

"Hm, certainly, it is odd. The only thing that would link you to the Grail would be your father, who was appointed as supervisor, but... No, you could think that's the very reason."

"... Which means?"

"The Grail might have already anticipated that the Holy Church would support the Tōsaka family. So, an executor of the Church who would acquire command Seals would back up the Tōsaka."

Saying this, Tokiomi, who feels satisfied at having to end the discussion, added.

"In other words, the Grail is giving me, a Tōsaka, two shares of command Seals, and for that, it chose you as a Master.

... How about it? Does this explanation satisfy you?"

So, he gave his conclusion with such a daring tone.

"..."

This arrogant confidence seems to suit the man called Tōsaka Tokiomi. This man holds a dignity that just borders sarcasm.

Certainly, as a magus, he was a man of excellence. And he must have had the self-confidence that came with that excellency. That's why he probably would never doubt his own judgement.

That meant that you would never get any other answer from Tokiomi here and now — That was Kirei's conclusion.

"When do we go to Japan?"

Hiding his inner discouragement, Kirei changed the subject.

"I will visit Great Britain for a bit. I have a small task to do at the Clock Tower.

You will go to Japan a step ahead. I will tell my family."

"Understood. Then, I will go at once."

"Kirei, go ahead first. I need to discuss something with Mr. Tōsaka."

Nodding to his father's words, Kirei stood up from his seat and, after a silent bow, left the room alone.

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Remaining in the room, Tōsaka Tokiomi and Father Risei silently watched Kotomine Kirei off.

"That's a reliable son you have, Kotomine-san."

"His strength as an 'Executor' is guaranteed. None of his colleagues are more studious than him during training. I'm the one you should doubt."

"Ho... Is that the exemplary attitude of a defender of the faith?"

"Oh, it shames me to say it, but this Kirei is the only pride of a senile old fool like me."

The old Father was known for his rigor, but, feeling at ease with Tokiomi, he smiled. As his eyes turned to his only son, his trust and love clearly showed up.

"As I still didn't have a child past 50, I had given up on an heir... But now, I am amazed at how far my son has gone."

"Though, he agreed more easily than I thought, hasn't he.”?

"My son would jump in a fire if that was the will of the Church. That's how far he would go for his faith."

Though Tokiomi didn't mean to doubt the words of the old Father, the impression he had had of Father Risei's son wasn't quite such a 'passionate faith'. The quiet appearance of the man called Kirei felt more nihilistic to him.

"To be honest, that was a disappointment. However, I look at him, it seems he was just involved in something that is of no concern to him."

"No... That might really be salvation for him."

Speaking ambiguously, Father Risei started muttering gloomily.

"It is a private matter, but his wife died a few days ago. They hadn't been married for even two years."

"Oh, I—"

Tokiomi was at loss of words under the unexpected circumstances.

"Though it doesn't show, he seems to endure it fairly well. ... He has too many memories in Italy. Maybe right now, for Kirei, returning to his old fatherland for a new mission could help heal his wounds."

Risei sighed in his speech. Tokiomi kept gazing straight at him.

"Tokiomi-kun, doesn't one's true worth show as hardship increases?"

Tokiomi deeply bowed at the old priest's words.

"I am obliged. My debt towards the Holy Church and both generations of the Kotomine family will be carved as a family precept."

"Not at all. I am only fulfilling my oath for the future generation of Tōsaka. — The rest will be only praying for God's protection until your journey takes you to the 'Root'."

"Yes. My grandfather's regrets, the dearest wish of the Tōsaka... this is what my whole life has ever been for."

Hiding how much his self-confidence was suffocated by the weight of his responsibilities, Tokiomi nodded resolutely.

"This year, I will reach the Grail. I will make sure of that."

At Tokiomi's dignity, Father Risei blessed the memory of his late friend.

'My friend... You too got a good heir.'

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With the wind of the Mediterranean Sea rustling his hair, Kotomine Kirei returned from the villa atop the hill, alone and silent, on the narrow, winding path.

Finally, Kirei put in order the many impressions he had had of the man called Tōsaka Tokiomi, whom he had met just then.

Perhaps he had led a hard life. As if pride was proportionally converted to the experienced hardship, he was a man endowed with a firm dignity he could rightfully boast about.

He understands that sort of personality quite well. Kirei's very father was of the same kind as that Tōsaka Tokiomi.

Men who have defined the meaning behind their birth, behind their own existence, and followed it without a doubt. They definitely would never waver, never hesitate.

Forging it into an iron will of acting with a clear objective, vectorized only by the fulfillment of 'something' that was identified as their lifelong goal, in any aspects of their life.

The 'form of this conviction' can be, in the case of Kirei's father, a pious faith; and in Tōsaka Tokiomi's case, perhaps it was the self-confidence of one who was chosen — a privilege not for the plebeians, and the self-consciousness of someone with a responsibility to shoulder. He was one of those remaining 'genuine aristocrats' you would rarely find nowadays.

From then on, the existence of Tōsaka Tokiomi would probably hold important implications for Kirei... But even so, he was of a type that was incompatible with Kirei's kind. That was just the same as saying that he was similar to his father.

Those who see only their ideals can never understand the pain of those unable to have one. People like Tokiomi had a 'sense of purpose' as the base of their convictions, but that was totally absent in Kotomine Kirei's mind. Not once in over 20 years had he ever felt such a sensation.

By judging so, he couldn't consider the most noble idea, have comfort in any quest, or find rest in any pleasure. Such a man couldn't have any such thing as a sense of purpose in the first place.

He couldn't even understand how he was so far removed from the sense of values that the ordinary world held. Kirei couldn't even figure out a passion to throw himself into about anything.

He still believed that there was a God. That there was a supreme existence, although he didn't have the maturity to perceive it.

He lived believing that one day, the holiest word of God would lead him to the supreme truth and save him. Betting on that hope, clinging to it.

But in the depth of his heart, he already knew. That salvation would no longer come from the love of God for a man like him.

Being confronted to such anger and despair drove him to masochism. Under the pretense of penance for moral training, he simply kept wounding himself repeatedly. But those tortures forged Kirei's body like iron, and when he realized, he had risen to the top of the elite of the Holy Church as an 'Executor', where nobody had followed him.

Everyone called that 'glory.' Kotomine Kirei's self-control and devotion were praised as a model for the clergy. His father Risei was no exception.

Kirei understood very well why Kotomine Risei had so much faith and admiration for his son, but that was a misunderstanding so far off the point; for in reality, his heart was shameful. A whole lifetime's worth would probably not be enough to amend that misunderstanding.

Till this day, there is no one who has come to understand how much Kirei lacked.

Yes, even the only one woman he was to love —

"..."

Feeling a sense of lightheadedness, Kirei loosened his pace and put his hand to his forehead.

When he tried to remember the wife he had lost, he lost his diffuse thoughts in a rising mist. It felt like standing in a fog before a precipice. The instinct for survival told him to not to take even one step forward.

When he realized, he had arrived at the bottom of the hill. Kirei stopped and looked back to the faraway villa at the top.

Finally, he still hadn't reached a satisfactory conclusion on his interview with Tōsaka Tokiomi... That was the important problem that concerned Kirei the most.

Why had a miraculous power such as the 'Grail' chosen Kotomine Kirei?

Tokiomi's explanation was a desperate one. If the Grail wanted a supporter for Tokiomi, there must have had been as many a capable person as it wanted who would be friends with him; not Kirei.

There must have been a reason to his selection for the next Grail's appearance.

Yet... The more he thought about it, the more Kirei found the inconsistency worrying.

He essentially didn't have any 'sense of purpose', nor any ideal or aspiration. Regardless of the way you look at it, he had no reason to be the bearer of a miracle such as an 'almighty wish machine.'

With a gloomy face, Kirei looked at the three symbols that had appeared on the back of his right hand.

They say the Command Seals are a holy mark.

Would he find a pledge to carry, three years from now?

1 year ago

He immediately recognized the woman he was looking for.

In the early holiday afternoon, children can be seen playing on the lawn, bathed in the peaceful sunlight of the early autumn, with their parents watching over them, smiling. The plaza around the fountain of the park was overcrowded with the townspeople who brought their family for relaxation.

Even in such a crowd, he didn't lose his track.

No matter how crowded, no matter how far, he was certain he could find her effortlessly. Even though he didn't know if he could even meet her once a month, even though she already had a partner.

Only when he walked up to her did the woman in the shades of the trees notice his arrival.

"— Hey, long time no see."

"Oh — Kariya-kun."

Showing a modest, courteous smile, she lifted her eyes from the book she was reading.

Worn out — Seeing her like that, Kariya felt seized with a helpless anxiety. Something seemed to be tormenting her.

He immediately wanted to ask about the cause of that trouble, to exert himself to find a solution to this 'something' — but Kariya couldn't bring it up even if driven with that impulse. He wasn't so close that he could devote such an unreserved kindness; that wasn't his place.

"It's been 3 months. This trip has been pretty long this time."

"Ah... Eh, yes."

In his sweet dreams, her smile surely appears. But he doesn't have the courage to face her when he is really in front of her. It has been so for the past 8 years, and Kariya will probably never be able to face that smile forever after.

Because she makes him so nervous, he never knows what to talk about after greeting each other, and a subtle blank appears. That too happens every time.

To break the awkward silence, Kariya looked for the one he can easily talk to.

— There. Playing in the middle of the other kids on the grass, the twin ponytails happily dancing about. Though very young, the girl already showed signs of the beautiful face she has inherited from her mother.

"Rin-chan."

Kariya called, waving a hand. As soon as she noticed, the girl he called Rin rushed toward him with a bright smile.

"Welcome back, uncle Kariya! Did you bring me another present?"

"Now Rin, watch your manners..."

The young girl seems to be oblivious to the voice of her embarrassed mother. Rin's eyes shine with expectation, and Kariya, responding with the same smile, holds out one of the two presents he carries behind his back.

"Waah, beautiful..."

An elaborate brooch made of glass beads of various sizes captures the heart of the girl at the first glance. Though it might seem a bit much for a girl her age, Kariya is well aware that Rin has precocious tastes.

"Uncle, thank you as always. I will take care of it."

"Ha ha, if you like it, uncle is happy too."

Gently stroking Rin's head, Kariya looks for the intended recipient of the other present he brought.

For some reason, she is nowhere to be found in the park.

"Say, so where's Sakura-Chan?"

Hearing Kariya's question, Rin’s smile immediately vanished.

Her face looked as if she had stopped thinking at all, the face of a resigned child forced to mindlessly accept reality.

"Sakura, she’s...already gone."

With a blank look, Rin gave a monotonous reply. Then, as if avoiding Kariya's question, she ran back to the kids she was playing with earlier.

"..."

Bewildered by Rin's incomprehensible words, Kariya looked at Rin's mother questioningly with sudden realization. She turned her eyes away to an empty spot with a gloomy look.

"What’s that mean...?"

"Sakura is neither my daughter nor Rin's sister anymore."

Her tone was dry, but more courageous than her daughter Rin's.

'That child, has gone to the Matō family."

Ma - to —

The name, sounding deeply familiar yet abominable, violently ripped out Kariya’s heart.

"That can't... What the hell does it mean, Aoi-san!?"

"You shouldn't even need to ask, right? Especially you, Kariya-kun."

Crushing Kariya's heart, Rin's mother — Tōsaka Aoi gave a harsh, cold-hearted reply, never looking at him, as if indifferent.

"Of course, you of all people should know why the Matōs needed a child with magi ancestry to succeed them, don’t you?"

"How...could you...accept that?"

"That is what he decided. This is the decision of the head of the Tōsaka family, acceding to a request from the old sworn friends, the Matōs. ... My opinion doesn’t matter."

For that reason, mother and child, older sister and younger sister, were separated.

Of course, she wouldn’t agree. But both Aoi and even the young Rin knew well why they cannot but accept it. That is because this is what it means to live as a magus. Kariya knew that cruel fate all too well.

"... Are you fine with it?"

Aoi replies with a feeble, bitter smile to Kariya's rock hard voice.

"I was prepared for something like that when I decided to marry into the Tōsaka family, when I decided to become the wife of a magus. When you enter the bloodline of a magus, it is a mistake to seek for the normal happiness of a family."

And, facing Kariya who tried to speak again, the magus' wife gently, but clearly, stopped him —

"This is a matter between the Tōsakas and the Matōs. This is of no concern to you, who turned your back to the world of the magi."

She finished with a slight nod.

With this, Kariya couldn’t move anymore. As if he had turned into one of the trees in the park, his chest felt tight from weakness and helplessness.

Since long ago when she was a girl, then when she became a wife, and even after she had two children, Aoi's attitude toward Kariya had never changed. Three years older than him, friends since infancy, she had always attended to Kariya, kindly and without constraint, like a real sister to a brother.

This was the first time that she so clearly pointed out their respective position.

"If you are ever able to see Sakura, please treat her kindly. She has always been fond of you, Kariya-kun."

With Aoi watching over her, Rin was playing brightly, full of energy, as if to chase her grief away.

As if Rin's very behavior was the reply that pushed back the speechless Kariya beside her, Tōsaka Aoi showed him only the profile of a peaceful mother in the holidays.

But Kariya still didn't miss it. There was no way he could miss it.

The firm, serene Tōsaka Aoi who accepted her fate.

She couldn’t even completely conceal the tears gathering at the corner of her eyes.

※※※※※

Kariya hastened through the scenery of the hometown he thought he would never see again.

Every time he came back to the city of Fuyuki, he would never cross the bridge to Miyama.

That must have been 10 years. Unlike the Shinto area where business went on every day, nothing had changed in this neighborhood where time seemed to have stopped.

Quiet streets filled with memories, but not a single pleasant one would come back if he stopped to have a look. Ignoring such a worthless nostalgia, Kariya thought about his dialogue with Aoi an hour ago.

"... Are you fine with it?"

The thoughtless reprieve Aoi threw at him while turning her eyes away. He hadn't used such a sharp tone in several years.

Don't raise your eyes, don't be a bother... That's how he had lived. Anger, hatred, Kariya had left it all in the desolate streets of Miyama. After throwing away his hometown, Kariya had never made a fuss over anything. Even the foulest, ugliest matters were nothing compared to what he had hated in this land.

That's why — yeah. It must have been 8 years since his voice last held such feelings.

That time, wasn't it with the same woman Kariya had used the same tone, the same words?

"Are you fine with it?" — He had shot the same question that time. Turning toward his senior childhood friend the night before she received the name of Tōsaka.

He never forgot. The expression she had at that time.

She had given a small nod, as if she was sorry, as if apologizing, yet still blushing with shyness. Kariya had been defeated by the quiet smile.

"... I was prepared... It is a mistake to seek for the normal happiness of a family..."

Such words were but a lie.

That day, 8 years ago, when she was proposed to by the young magus, her smile definitely showed her faith in happiness.

And so, Kariya fully accepted his defeat because he trusted that smile.

Maybe, the man who was marrying Aoi, that man was the only one who could make her happy.

But that was a mistake.

More than anyone else, Kariya should have realized that it was a fatal mistake.

Because he had fully realized how despicable magecraft was, hadn't Kariya rejected his fate and left his family?

Nevertheless, he could forgive that.

Even with him who had turned his back in fear, well aware of how abominable magecraft was... His most important woman had surrendered, of all people, to the man who was the most alike a magus.

What now burns in Kariya's chest is, regret.

Not once, but twice, had he chosen the wrong words.

He shouldn't have asked, "are you fine with it?", but instead he should have concluded, "you must not do that".

And 8 years ago, if he had restrained Aoi — maybe there could have been a future different from today. If she hadn't bound herself to Tōsaka that day, she would have been out of the cursed doom of a magus, and she could have led a normal life.

And today, this early afternoon in the park, if he had reacted differently to the decision between the Tōsakas and the Matōs, — maybe it would have shocked her. She could have rejected the nonsense of an outsider.

But even so, she couldn't blame only herself like that. She didn't have to completely suppress her tears.

Kariya absolutely could not forgive this. He who repeated the fault twice. For his punishment, he returned to the place of the days he had left behind.

Certainly, there was, there, a way to atonement. The world he had once turned his back to. The fate he had poorly escaped.

But now, he could confront that.

If he thought of the only one woman in the world he didn't want to grieve for —

Under the sky where the twilight was nearing, he stopped in front of a towering, luxuriant western-styled house.

From a warp of 10 years, Matō Kariya stood before the gate of his home again.

※※※※※

Starting at the front door, the small but risky dispute soon carried out inside the Matō residence where Kariya settled down on a sofa of the drawing room.

"I thought I told you never to show your face in front of me again."

Sitting facing Kariya, the small, old man who spat the detestable words is Matō Zōken, head of the family. He was so withered that his bald head and limbs looked like he was mummified, yet the light deep in his eyes filled his spirit; both his appearance and personality made him an uncommon, mysterious person.

To tell the truth, even Kariya couldn't determine the exact age of the old man. The aberrant entry in the family register said he was the father of Kariya and his brother. But even at his great-grandfather, his ancestor at the third generation, there were records of the old man named Zōken in the family tree. There was no way to figure out for how many generations this man came to reign over the Matō family.

Speaking of repulsive deeds, he was a magus who could be called immortal, stretching and stretching his age. A person at the root of the Matō bloodline with little direct connection with Kariya. He was a genuine specter surviving in the current era.

"I got wind of something inexcusable. About how the Matō house is carrying out some outrageous disgrace."

Kariya had manifold admitted that the magus he was now facing was powerful with an unequaled cruelty. A man who was the personification of everything Kariya had come to hate, despise, scorn throughout his existence. Even if that man were to kill him, Kariya would definitely, severely hate him until the end. With the confrontation 10 years ago, Kariya had faced that strong spirit and escaped the Matōs, managing to earn his freedom.

"I heard that you took in the second daughter of the Tōsakas. Do you want to preserve the Matō lineage of magi that much?"

Zōken scowled at the provoking tone of Kariya's cross-examination.

"Do you want to talk about it? Nothing else? Just who do you think is responsible for the downfall of the Matōs?

In the end, the son this Byakuya finally got turned up to be void of Magic Circuits. The pure-blooded Matō line has collapsed with this generation. But, more than your big brother Byakuya, you are the one who has realized the basis of a magus, Kariya. If you had obediently received your inheritance and accessed the secrets of the Matōs, we wouldn't be pressed by the circumstances. And this is all yours..."

But Kariya, with a snort, deflected the threatening attitude of the old man who was heating up with foam on his mouth.

"Stop your comedy, vampire. What's with the fuss over having the Matō line persist? Don't make me laugh. There's nothing wrong for you even if no new Matō generation is produced. The discussion is over since you yourself will continue living for two hundred years or a thousand years, eh?"

As Kariya guessed right, Zōken gave a leery smile, as if the anger up to now was a lie. That was the smile of a monster that doesn't even consider human emotions as splinters.

"As usual, you are a loveless fellow. You speak and behave frankly."

"Whatever, that's how you trained me. I'm not one to beat around the bush."

A wet sound came out of the depth of the old man's throat, as if he was pleasantly laughing.

"That's right. I might probably outlive the likes of you and Byakuya's son in a distant future.

But even then, it is only a question of how long I can preserve this body from its daily rotting. Even if a Matō heir is unneeded, a Matō magus is required. To gain the Grail, that is."

"... So, in the end, that's what your goal is?"

That went well with Kariya's guess. It was immortality that this old magus was firmly chasing after.

The wishing-machine called the "Grail" could fulfill it once completed... What was choking this monster that wouldn't die after centuries was the hope placed in this miracle.

"The return of the 60-year-cycle is for the next year. But for the fourth Holy Grail War, the fourth Heaven's Feel, there will be no player from the Matōs.

Byakuya doesn’t have the prana level for a Servant. He really doesn't even have the Command Seals.

But even if we must desist for this battle, there is a chance for the next one in 60 years. There is no doubt that an excellent user can be born from the daughter of the Tōsaka. I have high expectations for this as a good vessel."

The face of Tōsaka Sakura popped out behind Kariya's eyelids.

A late bloomer always behind her sister Rin, a frail-looking girl.

A child way too young to bear the cruel fate of a magus.

Swallowing his seething rage, Kariya feigns a calm attitude.

Right here and now, he is here to negotiate with Zōken. There is nothing to gain from being emotional.

"— If that's what it's about, if you want the Grail, then there's no need for Tōsaka Sakura, right?"

Zōken's eyes narrow down, suspicious of the hidden meaning in Kariya's words.

"You, what trick do you have in mind?"

"A deal, Matō Zōken. I'll bring the Matō name to the next Heaven's Feel. In exchange, you'll release Tōsaka Sakura."

Taken aback only for the time of one breath, Zōken then sniggered scornfully.

"Kha, don't be stupid. A failure who never studied anything would be the Master of a Servant in one year?"

"You have the secret for making that possible, don't you? With your worm-using skills you're so proud of, old man."

Kariya jumps straight to the point, staring in the eyes of the old magus head-on.

"Plant your "Crest worms" in me. You can do that, in the flesh and blood of the filthy Matōs. The compatibility should be far better than with the daughter of another house."

Zōken's face changes back from that of a human to that of a magus, all expression vanishing.

"Kariya — Do you want to die?"

"Don't tell me you're worried? 'Father'."

Zōken seemed to realize Kariya was serious. Coldly, the magus evaluated Kariya, gazing at him, then took a deep breath.

"I must say I had wished more of you than of Byakuya. After expanding your Magic Circuits with the Crest worms, if we can train you thoroughly for one year, maybe the Grail will end up selecting you.

... Even then, I cannot understand. Why would you go so far for one little girl?"

"Just let the Matō tenacity be taken care of by the hands of the Matōs. Don't involve unrelated outsiders."

"Again, with your admirable dedication."

As if he was enjoying this, Zōken showed a complacent smile, full of his evil disposition.

"But, Kariya, if your purpose is to not have anybody involved, aren't you a little late?

Do you know how many days it has been since the daughter of Tōsaka came to our family?"

Despair, rushing in, crushed Kariya's chest.

"Old man, you mean —"

"There were terrible cries for the first three days, but by the fourth day, she was silent. Today, she was thrown at dawn in the worm storage to test how well she would last, but, ho ho, she endured it for half a day and is still breathing. What do you know, the Tōsaka material isn't defective.”?

Kariya's shoulders shivered with a murderous intent beyond hatred.

He wanted to seize this evil magus by the neck, strangle him with all his strength, and break it off, right this instant —

— That was the impulse that was raging mad inside Kariya.

But, Kariya accepted it. Even though he was getting thin to the point of withering, Zōken was a magus. Kariya couldn't even try to kill him off right here. He didn't even have a fragment of the power required for that.

To save Sakura, there was no other way than negotiating.

Seeing through the conflict inside Kariya, Zōken let out a satisfied, gloomy chuckle.

"So, what will you do? The little girl is already broken, filled by the worms from head to toes.

But if you still think you want to save her, well, I won’t think about it twice."

"... No objection. Let’s just do it."

Kariya replied with a chilling voice. Of course, he had no other choice.

"Excellent, excellent. Well, we can still train you as much as possible. But, know that I will go on with Sakura's training as long as you don't show any results."

Cackling, the good humor of the old magus was making a fool of Kariya and his rage and despair.

"Rather than reinstating a failure who had already betrayed us, the success rate of getting a child from this is far higher. I favor getting the best out of each opportunity one at a time. I am giving up on the Heaven's Feel this time, since I already considered it a lost battle.

But, if in one in a million chance, you could get the Grail — I agree. If that happens, naturally I won't have any business with the daughter of Tōsaka. I would be finished with the one thing I am training her for."

"... You’re not double-dealing, are you? Matō Zōken."

"Kariya, if you think you need to be five-faced to speak to me, try enduring the Crest worms first.

Yes, try to be the nursery for the worms for a week first. If you haven't died of insanity by then, I will take it you are indeed serious."

Leaning on his cane, straightening his back with difficulty, Zōken turned toward Kariya with an alien smile that fully showed his wickedness.

"Then, Let’s begin the preparations without delay. We will finish the treatment immediately. If you want to reconsider, do it now."

Simply nodding silently, Kariya threw away his last hesitation.

He will be Zōken's puppet once he lets the worms inside his body. With that, there will be no way to rebel against the old magus. If he can even get qualified as a magus, Kariya and his Matō blood will definitely receive the Command Seals.

Heaven's Feel. The only chance of salvation for Tōsaka Sakura. The choice he would never be able to reach with this flesh and blood.

Kariya may lose his life in exchange. Even if he wasn't shot down by the other Masters, Kariya's flesh would be devoured by the worms by bringing up the Crest worms for a time as short as a year, and his life expectancy would not be longer than only a few years.

But that doesn't matter.

Kariya's decision was too slow. Aoi's child would have lived peacefully with her mother if he had had the same determination 10 years ago. The fate he had refused had been passed around and had fallen onto a blameless girl.

There is no redemption for that. If there was a path to atonement, it would be none other than to give back a normal life to the girl.

In addition, if he had to completely wipe out the remaining six master’s to reach the Grail...

Amongst those who brought tragedy to the girl named Sakura, there was at least one person he could bring a requiem to.

"Tōsaka, Tokiomi..."

As the head of one of the 3 families of the beginning, there is no doubt he would bear the Command Seals.

Different from his sense of crime toward Aoi, and from his hatred toward Zōken, there was a dwelling hatred that had piled up until this day.

A dark feeling of vengeance had quietly started to burn in the depth of Matō Kariya's heart like a banked fire.

Act 1

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Act 1

Nobody had ever understood Waver Velvet's talent.

As a magus, he was neither born of a famous family nor lucky enough to meet a good master. Mostly self-taught, he finally got himself accepted to the Clock Tower, the teaching arm of the Magus Association that controlled magi across the world.

Waver always believed this fact to be incomparably honorable, being very proud of his talent. "I am the most capable student of the Clock Tower since its founding. Anyone should have to respect me." At least, Waver himself thought this way. In truth, the magus lineage of the Velvets had only existed for three generations.

As time goes on, the number of Magic Circuits and concentration of Crests constantly increase and expand. Many students that receive scholarships to the Clock Tower are offspring of families with more than six generations of pure magi blood.

The wonders of magecraft could not be completed within one generation; therefore, the results of a whole life of research by parents are passed on to their children... only through this could their magecraft become more refined. The stronger prana of the old magi families is stronger precisely for this reason. Compared to the offspring of well-established magi family, Waver's Crest concentration and Magic Circuit quantity paled by comparison.

Furthermore, because a magi's Magic Circuit count is determined at birth, there are some ancestral magi families that deliberately contrive to increase the amount of Magic Circuits in an offspring, thus distancing themselves from new magi families in this regard. In other words, advantages within the world of magecraft are predetermined even before birth. This is a commonly accepted point of view.

But Waver did not see it that way.

Differences in ancestry could be made up for by increasing experience. Even without exceptional Magic Circuits, the difference between quality caused by birth could be bridged through deep understanding and skilled utilization of magecraft. Waver had always believed that deeply. He believed himself to be an excellent example of that and had always strived to show off his abilities.

But the reality was cruel. The workings of the Clock Tower are determined by those who boast of their ancestral bloodline, and those who endlessly fawn over them.

Even the lecturers were no exception, only expecting anything from those with great lineages. To a "pauper" researcher like Waver, they were reluctant to even let him into the library to browse books, let alone teach him magecraft.

Why are the expectations of a magus' future dependent on his lineage?

Why is the credibility of a theory dependent on the experience of one's lineage?

Nobody cared about Waver's questions. The lecturers used flowery language to trick Waver when presented with his research thesis, then acted as if Waver had been convinced otherwise, laughing at it, ignoring it.

It truly is unbelievable. His anxiety drove Waver to act.

To expose the Magus Association's corrupt system, Waver wrote an exposition, " An Inquiry of Magecraft's Path in the New Century." The result of three years of conceptualization and one year of writing, it viciously attacked traditional views, was written with painstaking effort, presented clear and intense thought, flawless. If seen by the Inquisitors, it would have definitely caused quite the scandal.

But - The Department of Eulyphis's lecturer tossed it out after casually reading through it just once.

His name was Kayneth El-Melloi Archibald. He was the heir of the Archibald family with nine generations of magus lineage, a very popular man whom everyone called "Lord El-Melloi." Engaged to the daughter of the principal, a lecturer at such a young age, he was the best of the best. He was also the representative of authority that Waver despised.

"A man who gives in to delusions such as yourself is not suited for research, Waver" - lecturer Kayneth said in a condescending manner, without a shred of pity in his voice. Kayneth's ice cold gaze was something Waver would never forget.

In the nineteen years of Waver's life, he had never been humiliated worse.

If Kayneth had the talent to be a lecturer, it should have been impossible for him to not understand Waver's talent. No, he was probably jealous precisely because he understands. He was probably afraid of Waver's hidden talent, becoming jealous of him, treating Waver as a threat to his own position. That is probably why he treated Waver's exposition in such a violent manner. To purposely rip an exposition of gathered wisdom... is this the attitude a scholar should assume?

Unforgivable. His talent, which could cause the world to tremble, was actually arbitrarily written off by an authority. There really is no justice. But not one person sympathized with Waver's frustration. The Magus Association was actually - in Waver's point of view - already corrupt to the core. But... while living these infinitely frustrating days, Waver heard a rumor.

The rumor was that the reputed Lord El-Melloi, for the sake of adding an entry to his resume for his vanity, had decided to join the nearby thaumaturgical competition in the far east.

Waver began researching about the details of this 'Heaven's Feel' overnight; he was deeply mesmerized by the horrific details. With the wish-granting 'Holy Grail,' summoning Heroic Spirits into the present world and commanding them was possible, resulting in a battle to the death among their Masters.

Title, authority, everything lost its value: skill was the only factor.

It truly was a bit barbaric, but also a simple yet fair method of judging superiority. For an unrecognized genius, this was an excellent opportunity, an idealistic stage to exhibit himself. Lady Luck had finally smiled at the excited Waver.

It began with the financial department's negligence. Lecturer Kayneth's requested holy relic from Macedonia was delivered to Waver to give to his teacher along with normal parcels, when it should have been a parcel opened only when Kayneth himself was present.

Waver immediately realized that was a catalyst used to summon Servants in the Heaven's Feel. And so, he received a once in a lifetime opportunity.

He no longer had a shred of love left for the corrupt Clock Tower. The glory of graduating as a valedictorian was trash compared to the honor brought by Fuyuki's Holy Grail. The moment Waver Velvet became victorious in the war would be the moment when those insignificant members of the Magus Association would grovel at his feet.

That day, Waver left England, heading for the island country in the far east. The Clock Tower immediately realized who stole Kayneth's parcel but did not chase after him. Nobody knew Waver was interested in the Heaven's Feel.

But there was something Waver didn't know. Everyone thought he did no more than to hide Kayneth's relic in rage. Nobody thought he was on the level to knowingly risk his life to participate in a thaumaturgical competition. In that aspect, the Clock Tower really had underestimated Waver.

In the far eastern village, Fuyuki City, the place that would decide his destiny, Waver hid under the blanket of the bed, desperately trying to hold back his laughter. No, it was impossible to hold back. Illuminated by the

dim sunlight coming through the cracks of the curtain, he raised his right hand every few seconds, letting out some muffled laughter.

With the relic in his hands, himself in Fuyuki, and enough quality as a magus... How could the Grail turn a blind eye to someone like that? Indeed, the pattern of the tripartite Command Seal had clearly materialized on Waver's right-hand last night, proving that he was a Master, one who can summon a Servant. Even the ruckus made by the roosters in the courtyard near dawn went unnoticed.

"Waver, breakfast time." The voice of the old woman calling him on the stairs sounded different this morning, not as annoying.

To begin this nonmemorable day, Waver quickly began changing.

Although a backwater place for an island nation, Fuyuki City had a lot of tourists from other places. And precisely because of that, Waver's appearance, obviously different from that of the Japanese, did not attract too much attention. Even so, Waver was cautious and cast a suggestion spell on the old couple who had always lived alone, deceiving them into thinking that Waver was their grandson. He had very successfully used a fake identity to live comfortably here. He didn't need to pay hotel fees; it was like killing two birds with one stone. Things worked out perfectly; Waver began to have more and more admiration for his own ability to adapt.

To fully enjoy this mild morning, Waver descended the stairs to the first-floor kitchen. Like any other morning, the plebeian dining room table was decorated with newspapers; the television news and cooking welcomed the freeloader openly.

"Good morning Waver, did you sleep well?"

"Yes, grandpa. I was sound asleep until morning."

Waver answered with a smile while he spread jam thickly on his toast. The soggy bread that cost only a hundred and eighty yen per catty wasn't very pleasant to chew. Usually, that was very unsatisfactory, so it could only be made up for by putting lots of jam on it.

Glen and Martha Mackenzie immigrated to Japan from Canada more than twenty years ago. But their son could not get used to the Japanese lifestyle and went back, creating a family in his home country. Their grandson, raised in Japan until he was ten, also went back. Not a single letter was sent, let alone a visit. Ten years passed in this manner. Discovering that information through hypnosis, Waver decided that that kind of family was ideal for him. Through suggestions, Waver transformed the old couple's

impression of their grandson into his own image, successfully becoming their beloved grandson, "Waver Mackenzie."

"But Martha, ever since dawn, I felt that the chickens were very noisy... would you know why this is?"

"We have three chickens. Where exactly did they come from...?"

Hastily making up an excuse, Waver hurriedly swallowed the bread in his mouth.

"Ah, that... I have a friend who sent his pet chickens for us to take care of for a few days. He's going on a trip and won't be home, so they'll be here temporarily. I'm returning them this evening."

"Ah, so that's how it is."

It seems like they didn't really mind, so the two easily believed it. The fact that these two old people were hard of hearing was good for him: the incessant crows of the three chickens nearly annoyed the surrounding neighbors to death that day.

But the most stressed person was Waver. As soon as he found the Command Seals on his hand, Waver excitedly began preparing sacrificial offerings needed for the ceremony.

He never thought finding a chicken farm nearby would be so difficult. He finally found one, but actually catching three chickens wasted nearly an hour. He finally got home just as the sky began to grow bright, covered with chicken droppings, hands pecked bloody.

In the Clock Tower, animals used as sacrificial offerings were always prepared. But here, how can a genius magus such as myself be in such a piteous state for catching merely three chickens? Having this thought, Waver almost cried out in lamentation. But staring at the Command Seals on his right hand, his mood began to gradually brighten.

He decided to hold the ceremony tonight. Those annoying chickens could at most live until then. And, Waver wanted to have the strongest Servant. The relic hidden in the closet of the second-floor bedroom... That would be the catalyst for summoning a great Heroic Spirit... Waver already knew that much.

The withering, half decomposed piece of cloth was a piece of the cape that once hung on the shoulder of a king. The legendary "King of Conquerors" who destroyed the Achaemenid Empire of Persia and created the world's

first huge empire spanning from Greece to north western India. His Heroic Spirit would descend upon Waver through summoning tonight, to guide him to the glorious Grail.

"... Grandpa, grandma, I'm sending the chickens back to my friend's house tonight, so I might be a bit late. Don't worry about me."

"Okay, be careful. Fuyuki isn't too safe lately."

"As in, that fabled serial killer has appeared once more. This world really is too scary." Eating cheap sliced bread at that long dining table, Waver was surrounded by life's greatest happiness. The noisy cries of those chickens were only slightly grating.

-282:14:28

The darkness was permeated by a thousand years of ambition. Emiya Kiritsugu and Irisviel answered the summons of the head of the Einzbern family, rushing to the Einzbern's old castle sealed off by ice, to the grandest yet darkest place in it: the ceremony chamber.

It was definitely not for praising the gods for favors, or letting spirits find their peace. As a castle of magi, the so-called ‘prayer room’ is used for executing thaumaturgical ceremonies by sacrificial offerings. As such, the stained glass does not portray any saint, no, but rather the long history of the Einzbern’s pursuit of the Grail.

Of the three founding families, the Einzbern spent the most time searching for the Grail. They enclosed themselves in the deep, icy mountains, severing all ties with the outside world, and began to seek the miracles of the Grail a thousand years ago. But their search was filled with setbacks and humiliation, suffering and opposition. Searching like that, they failed.

Finally, they grew weary of their solitary search, and agreed to cooperate with two outside families, the Tōsaka and Matō, two hundred years ago.

In the Heaven’s Feel rituals that followed, they never won, as their Master always fell short. Their solution, nine years ago, was to hire a magus specialized in fighting from outside the family.

Emiya Kiritsugu can be said to be the trump card of the Einzbern family, ones who have always been proud of their pure bloodline. To accommodate him, they changed their family creed, only for the second time.

Passing down the halls, Kiritsugu caught sight of a relatively new stained window.

On it was drawn the Einzbern’s "Holy Maiden of Winter" Lizleihi Justizia, and two magi waiting on her, left and right. All three of them extended their hands to the Grail in the sky. It was easy to tell from the composition and balance how much the Einzbern looked down on the Tōsaka and Matō, and their humiliation on having to rely on them. The painting communicated it all.

If he was lucky enough to win and survive the upcoming war, thought Kiritsugu, laughing at himself bitterly, his own image would probably be displayed like that on a window, against his will.

The old magus king of this icy castle awaited Kiritsugu and Irisviel in front of the sacrificial altar.

He was Jubstacheit von Einzbern, better known as "Acht" after he became the eighth head of the Einzbern family. By prolonging his life, he had lived for almost two centuries, leading the Einzberns through every one of the Grail wars. He did not remember the Justizia era, but ever since the second Heaven’s Feel, old Acht has suffered the pain of defeat many times. To him, the anxiety that he feels at this third opportunity for the Grail is extraordinary.

"The holy relic we requested people to find in Cornwall finally arrived this morning." Stroking his white beard like a frozen waterfall, old Acht stared at Kiritsugu, an astute light emitting from his deep sockets, hiding his senility. Kiritsugu has lived in the old castle for a long time; yet, he can never tolerate the bias and pressure he feels in Acht’s eyes every time he meets him.

Acht’s had indicates the sacrificial altar, which holds a large charchol colored box, trussed tightly. “using this as a catalyst, it’s possible to summon the strongest Heroic Spirit of the Sword. Kiritsugu, count this as the Einzbern family's greatest aid to you."

"I am deeply grateful, dear head of family." Pretending to be expressionless, Kiritsugu bowed deeply.

The Grail seems to have accepted the Einzbern family breaking the rules and including blood from outside. The Command Seal appeared on Kiritsugu’s right hand three years ago. Soon, he will bear the zealous, thousand-year-old wish of the Einzbern family and participate in the fourth Heaven’s Feel.

The old man turned his eyes to Irisviel, who was facing downwards in respect. "Irisviel, what's the status of the vessel?" "No problems. Even in Fuyuki, it will function normally," Irisviel answered fluently.

The wish granting machine, the omnipotent chalice, is only a spiritual entity and does not possess a physical form. To allow its Holy Grail form to descend, a vessel for it must be prepared. As such, the war of seven Servants for the Grail can be called a spiritual evocation ritual.

The duty of preparing a vessel for the Grail, ever since the beginning of the Heaven’s Feel, has been carried out by the Enisbern family. For the fourth War, the mission of creating the vessel has fallen to Irisviel. Therefore, she must leave for Fuyuki with Kiritsugu: she must be at the battlefield.

Old man Acht, eyes shining with insane strength, nodded seriously. "This time... no one must survive. Kill the six Servants; this time we must acquire the Third Magic, the Golden Grail."

"Yes sir!" Hearing the burning fervor in the old man’s command, magus and homunculus, spouses bearing the same fate, answered simultaneously.

But in his heart, Kiritsugu could care less about this old head of family's rigid desire. Achievement… Acht has condensed all of his emotions into this one word, and all of its infinite interpretations. Come to think of it… his spirit likely only has this rigidity towards achievement left.

The materialization of the spirit is a miracle. A thousand years seeking this lost miracle... in this long and arduous journey, they have long since lost their method and purpose. The Einzbern family continues to fight only to prove that their thousand-year journey was not wasted, only for the confirmation that the miracle does exist.

It doesn't matter. As per your expectations, through my hands I will grant you your sought-after Holy Grail.

As to not lose to old man Acht's enthusiasm, Emiya Kiritsugu said so in his mind.

But that's not all. I will use that omnipotent chalice to grant my own deepest wish...

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Kiritsugu and Irisviel went back to their own rooms, and opened the long box entrusted to them by the head of family. They were mesmerized by its contents. "Who would've thought... They were actually able to find this thing..." The usually composed Kiritsugu right now seems deeply impressed.

A scabbard made of gold and decorated with dazzling blue enamel. This sort of luxurious equipment should be called a treasure, to show dignity and nobility like a crown, or a scepter, instead of a weapon. Engraved into the middle is an inscription of the long-lost Fairy Letters, proving this scabbard is not a work of man.

"... Why isn't there the slightest flaw? Is this really the genuine relic made from an era over one thousand five hundred years ago?"

"This thing is a type of Conceptual Weapon. It definitely won't deteriorate physically, not mentioning that it's a holy relic that will be used as a catalyst. This treasure lies in the realm of magic." Irisviel took out the golden scabbard from the lined box carefully, holding it in her hands. "Legend says keeping this scabbard on one's body will heal the wounds of its possessor and can stop aging... of course, the mentioned facts are magical powers provided by its 'original owner.' Meaning as long as the Heroic Spirit summoned is functional, this thing itself can be used as a 'Master's Noble Phantasm.'"

The scabbard's one-of-a-kind ingenious design and exceptional beauty entranced Kiritsugu, but in just a few moments, his train of thought immediately changed to the direction of how to use it as a pragmatic 'tool.'

Watching Kiritsugu, Irisviel can't help but let out a small bitter smile. "That's really your style. A tool is a tool no matter what, right?"

"If you say it like that, even Servants are the same. No matter how famous the hero, as long as it is summoned as a Servant, to the Master he is a tool. It is impossible for a person who has unrealistic fantasies about a Servant to win this war."

When showing his aspect as a soldier, Emiya Kiritsugu's profile becomes rock hard and callous, quite unlike him as a father and a husband. Before,

when Irisviel didn’t understand him, she was truly afraid of that side of him. "Only someone like you is worthy of this scabbard -- this is grandfather's judgment."

"Is that really how it is?" Kiritsugu's expression shows obvious dissatisfaction. If Acht knew the reaction of his hired son-in-law to the holy relic he spent so much effort finding, he would certainly be unable to speak from rage.

"Are you unsatisfied about grandfather's present?" Irisviel did not blame Kiritsugu at all for wanting to make impertinent remarks, but only thought that asking that question would be amusing.

"How can that be? He has done more than enough for us. There cannot possibly be another Master who got a trump card as good as this."

"Then what are you so unsatisfied about?"

"With such a perfect holy relic, the summoned heroic spirit will definitely be the one we want. But his and my personalities are too vastly different. Originally, the nature of the summoned Servant will be affected by the master’s personality. In theory, all Servants have similar personalities to their Masters’. However, this holy relic takes priority. The more exact the nature of the relic, the more likely it is that the summoned Servant will be locked as a certain spirit.”

"... Meaning that you are uneasy about the contract with the 'King of Knights,' right?"

"Of course. There probably isn't anyone in the world who is more incompatible with the ways of the knight." Half-jokingly, Kiritsugu's lips curled in a slight smile. "A head-to-head battle is not my style, especially in a death match. If I am to attack, then it should be from behind while the enemy is asleep. Not caring about the time or place, just for the purpose of eliminating the enemy most efficiently, using the method with the greatest probability of success... You think that prestigious knight would aid me in such battles?"

Irisviel became silent, focusing on staring at the shiny scabbard. Without a doubt Kiritsugu was that type of soldier: attaining victory by any means necessary. There is no need to test it; the personalities of Kiritsugu and the owner of the scabbard would definitely clash.

"... But don't you think it's a waste? The owner of 'Excalibur' is without a doubt the strongest of the Saber Class."

That is correct. Only this glory-radiating scabbard is fit to pair that supreme sword. This is definitely the relic of that King of Knights whose tale has been passed down in legends since medieval times - King Arthur.

"That's right 'Saber' was already the strongest of the seven classes conjured by the Holy Grail. And if this King of Knights occupied this position... I've obtained a virtually invincible Servant. But the key here is the question of how to use this strongest battle force effectively. To be honest, if only the factor of being easy to control was considered, 'Caster' and 'Assassin' are actually more fitting to my style."

Then -- clashing with the Nandi flame-style, extravagant decor of the room, a light electronic sound interrupted the two's conversation. "Ah, finally here."

On the heavy black sandalwood table was a randomly placed notebook computer; the marvelous combination was like that of a stitching machine on an operating table. Magus lineages with long histories have never found the convenience of technology. The Einzbern family is no exception. The small electronic device that looks strange beyond compare to Irisviel is a personal item brought in by Kiritsugu. A magus who does not feel repulsed from using such machines is very rare; Kiritsugu was one of them. When he requested that a telephone line and power generator be installed, he had a huge argument with the old head. "...That sound, what is it?"

"The report sent from the fellow that infiltrated the London Clock Tower. I asked him to investigate the status of the participating Masters in this Heaven's Feel."

Kiritsugu sat in front of the machine and began operating the keyboard skillfully. The LCD monitor displays one new mail. That is the new technology commonly known as the "Internet" in the cities, which Kiritsugu has already explained to Irisviel. But her patience shows that she does not comprehend a bit of it.

"...Oh, there's information on the identities of four Masters."

The Tōsaka participant is obviously the head of family Tōsaka Tokiomi. A thorny person of the 'fire' attribute who specializes in jewel magecraft.

The Matō family seems to have forced that failure who couldn't succeed as the head of family into being a Master, what nonsense... but the old fogy of that family is exerting great effort to gain the grail.

As for the magi coming from out of town, first of all, there's the first-rate lecturer from the Clock Tower, Kayneth El-Melloi Archibald. Ah, he knows

about this man. Having both 'wind' and 'water' attributes, an expert who is proficient in spiritual evocation, summoning, and alchemy. He is currently the most renowned magus in the Association. How troublesome.

And there's a man sent by the Holy Church... Kotomine Kirei. Originally the representative of the 'Assembly of the 8th Sacrament,' he is the son of the one who fulfills the role of supervisor - Kotomine Risei. Sent to Tōsaka Tokiomi to learn magecraft three years ago, and then broke away from his teacher after being granted the Command Seals. Hmph, a fellow filled with the smell of gunpowder.

Kiritsugu browsed the detailed contents of the investigation; watching her husband, Irisviel was extremely bored. Suddenly, she noticed that Kiritsugu, who had been staring at the screen, had quite serious and tense expression. "...What's wrong?"

"This son of Father Kotomine. Even his past has been cleaned." Irisviel stood behind Kiritsugu and looked at the LCD monitor, following his finger. To Irisviel, looking at text not on paper was very difficult, but considering her husband's serious expression, she did not complain.

"...Kotomine Kirei. Born in 1967, accompanying his father Risei to the holy grounds since youth, graduating in '81 from the Theological College of Manresa St. Ignacio... skipping two grades, and was the student council president; he seems to be quite an accomplished man."

Kiritsugu nodded unhappily. "He could've definitely reached the position of cardinal minister like that, but he willingly abandoned this outstanding opportunity to join the Holy Church. In fact, he had lots of choices, so why did he choose to dedicate himself to such an inside organization of the church?"

"Perhaps he was influenced by his father? Kotomine Risei is part of the Holy Church too, right?"

"If that's the case, then he should have had the goal of retrieving lost holy relics like his father all along. Indeed, Kirei did join the same department as his father in the end, but before that, he was transferred three times and was once chosen as an 'Executor.' He was only ten-something years old then too. This job cannot be done without a certain amount of willpower." That was the Holy Church's bloodiest department, called the Shure’s Den for its responsibility of punishing heresies. To be able to gain the title of "Executor" would mean that he is a first-rate murderer, signifying that he has passed brutal and pious training to become mankind's weapon.

"Perhaps he is a faith fanatic. The younger the purer; such a thing as having a fanatic love for belief surpassing certain limits exists."

Even after hearing Irisviel's opinion, Kiritsugu still shook his head. "It's not like that... if it was, then this guy's situation of the past three years cannot be explained. If his faith was chaste, it would be impossible for him to transfer into the Magus Association; it seems to be an order from the Holy Church, or it's possible that he was more faithful to the religious doctrine than the organization. But even this cannot explain it, because there is no necessity to train in thaumaturgy this seriously. Look, Tōsaka Tokiomi's report about Kirei given to the Association. The scope of training includes alchemy, spiritual evocation, summoning, divination... he is even more adept at healing magecraft than Tōsaka Tokiomi. What exactly is the reason for this enthusiasm?"

Irisviel continued reading the document, all the way to the end where Kotomine Kirei's ability summary was. "...I say, this Kirei really is kind of strange, but is it worth it for you to scrutinize to this degree? Although he seems to be very talented, he's not really a cut above other people."

"Ah, that's what I find strange." Looking at the uncomprehending Irisviel, Kiritsugu patiently explained. "No matter what this man does, he cannot reach the 'first-rate' level. When it comes down to it, he's not some sort of genius, just a normal man. But his achievement of quick results through complete and total effort is indeed scary. Certainly, he has to exert ten or twenty times more effort than other people to achieve this level, but he actually stops when there's only one step left, and then without any lingering love transfers into another region. All the things he raised laboriously all along are tossed out like trash."

"..."

"He clearly chose a lifestyle many times more exciting than that of others, but in this man's life, he has never let others feel 'affection'. This guy - is definitely a dangerous man," Kiritsugu concluded.

Irisviel understood the meaning contained within his words. When he says "troublesome", although the opponent is very thorny, he actually is not seeing the opponent as a threat. The method of dealing with this type of opponent and the chance of success, Kiritsugu is already eighty percent assured. But when he uses the rating of "dangerous"... Emiya Kiritsugu only uses this rating against opponents he need to fight whole-heartedly.

"This man certainly does not believe anything. Only continuously seeking answers, that's why he experienced so much. The result is he still did not

find anything... he is that kind of morally void man. If I had to say what this guy's heart contains, then it's probably only anger and despair."

"...You are saying, to you this Executor is a more powerful foe than Tōsaka Tokiomi and Archibald?"

Pausing for a while, Kiritsugu nodded resolutely. "...A terrifying man. Indeed, Tōsaka and Lord El-Melloi are strong adversaries. But I think Kotomine Kirei's 'way of existence' is more fearful."

"Way of existence?"

"This man's heart is thoroughly void. He has nothing that can be called a wish. But why would a man like this bet his life to fight for the Grail?"

"...Is this not the intent of the Holy Church? Supposedly those guys mistakenly believed Fuyuki's Grail is the real relic and targeted it because of this, isn't that right?"

"No, only with that level of motivation, the Grail will not grant Command Seals. This man was chosen by the Grail as a Master. He must have some reason to obtain the Grail. What this reason really is, precisely because it cannot be seen... that's what makes this point terrifying."

Kiritsugu sighed deeply, looking at the monitor drearily, attempting to find something more from the character of Kotomine Kirei fabricated by dull text. "What do you think would happen if this kind of void, desireless man obtained the Grail? This man's whole life was built by despair. The power of the wish-granting machine, the Holy Grail might be tainted by the color of his despair."

Kiritsugu was being too indulgent of his sadness, and for the purpose of advising him, Irisviel shook her head strongly. "What's stored within me, the vessel of the Grail, I will not give to anyone. When the Grail is filled, the one who has the privilege of owning it - it's only you, Kiritsugu."

The elders of the Einzbern only wish for the completion of the Grail; that is their sole desire... but for this young couple, after this, they still have wishes that need realization. Dreams that need realization. Kiritsugu shut the lid of the notebook computer and hugged Irisviel tightly. "No matter what, we can't lose."

For his wife, right now compared to her family's desire, Irisviel cares more about her and her husband's ambition. This fact deeply moved Kiritsugu. "...I got it. The way to use the strongest Servant's power to the maximum limit."

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At the same time, at the far away land of the east across the sea, another person is receiving the same report by the spy in England as Kiritsugu.

Being a legitimate magus, Tōsaka Tokiomi would not resort to using the new technology of the vulgar world like Kiritsugu. He is adept at using the Tōsaka family's exclusive secret technique of communicating over long distances, a jewel magic passed down through the generations.

Towering in Miyama-chou of Fuyuki is the Tōsaka mansion. In Tokiomi's workshop set up below ground, an installment of experimental equipment similar to what is commonly known as the black pendulum was prepared. The difference between common physics experimental equipment and this is that, this pendulum's massive bob contains a magic jewel of the Tōsaka heirloom, and it was constructed so the ink flowing down from the string can moisten the jewel.

The rock paired with the jewel of this pendulum is currently in the possession of Tōsaka's spy. If this rock was placed in front of a roller and start writing, the matching pendulum's jewel would start to undulate, the ink dripping down would write perfect and errorless text on the Rollin paper underneath. That's the type of structure it was.

Right now, the jewel on the pendulum and the rock on the other side of the globe in London are undulating in sync, and through watching this strange repetitive motion without a pattern, the reporter's writing began to smoothly and accurately resurface.

Tokiomi, noticing this occurrence, picked up the paper without waiting for the ink to completely dry and began browsing what was recorded on it.

"— No matter how many times I look at this setup it always makes me feel like it's unreliable."

Kotomine Kirei, who's been standing guard off to the side all this time, expressed unscrupulous sentiments.

"Oh, so do you think fax is more convenient?

If this method was used, even if the power was out, there won't be any breakdowns. There's also no need to worry about the report being divulged.

Without the need to rely on new technology, us magi have long ago possessed apparatus not inferior to modern tools today."

Even so, as Kirei sees it, fax that can be used by anyone is more convenient. 'Anyone' can use it... this inevitability is definitely something that Tokiomi cannot comprehend. It's perfectly reasonable that the techniques and knowledge of aristocrats and commoners are different... even in the present, Tokiomi still bears this outdated mode of thinking; he is truly a legitimate 'magus.'

"The latest report from the 'Clock Tower.' The 'prodigy' Lord El-Melloi seems to have obtained a lost relic. If that's the case, then it is confirmed that he will be participating. Hmph, this is truly a thorny opponent. So, it's clear, there are now five master’s including myself..."

"It really makes me worry that there's still two positions empty until even now."

"Why, it simply means that there are no suitable bearers for the Command Seals. When time is running out, the Grail will randomly fill the seven slots regardless of quality. For the sake of having enough people, there should be two small characters. There's no need to be alert."

That's really suited to Tokiomi's optimism. Having been his student for three years, Kirei now understands his master very well. Although he's very thorough in preparation, he has a habit of missing small details once in action and taking care of these small details in his stead is probably his responsibility; Kirei has long since understood this.

"But speaking of being careful - Kirei, nobody saw you as you entered this house, right? In appearance, we're already enemies."

Completely according to Tōsaka Tokiomi's plan, the reality was twisted and announced. Kirei, who had been chosen by the Grail three years ago, carefully hid the insignia on his right hand according to Tokiomi's order, all the way up until this month before he announced the fact that the Command Seal is present on his hand. From that moment on, he severed his ties with Tokiomi as a contender for the Grail.

"No need to worry. Regardless of being able to see or not, there are no familiars or spells surveying this house. I —"

"— I guarantee that."

The voice of the third person cut in and, at the same time, a black shadow appeared beside Kirei.

The Heroic Spirit that's been accompanying Kirei in spirit form all this time has, at this moment, appeared in front of Tokiomi.

That skinny and tall shadow has a great difference in prana compared to humans. He's 'something inhuman.' A strange one wearing a long black cloak and a white skull-like mask to shield his features.

Yes, he is the first Heroic Spirit to be summoned in the fourth Heaven's Feel, the Servant "Assassin" who made a contract with Kotomine Kirei — Hassan-I Sabbāh.

"No matter what tricks they play, they cannot hide it from my eyes, the eyes of the Heroic Spirit of Subterfuge, Hassan. My Master, Kirei, does not have any aura of being followed by an enemy around him... you can relax."

As if understanding Tokiomi's position was higher than that of his own master Kotomine Kirei, Assassin politely reported with a bow.

And then Kirei said,

"As soon as a Grail-summoned Heroic Spirit appears, no matter which Class it belongs to, it would definitely be reported to father accurately and without error."

Father Risei was the supervisor of the Heaven's Feel, appointed as the head priest of and dispatched to the Fuyuki Church. Currently, he is in possession of a magical device known as the "spirit board." It has the function of displaying the attributes of the Heroic Spirits summoned by the Grail.

The identity of master’s can only be confirmed by reports from people, but the quantity and Class of appearing Servants, no matter where they are summoned, will definitely be displayed on the "spirit board," to grant the supervisor better control of the situation.

"According to my father, my Assassin is the only Servant to have been summoned so far. Other magi taking action is still yet to come."

"Yeah. But this is only a matter of timing. Sooner or later, there will be familiars of other master’s coming and going around this room. Because here and the Matō mansion, as well as Einzbern's dwelling, are already confirmed locations of Masters."

Compared to the three imperial families, the advantage of foreign magi is that their place of concealment is unknown to others. Because of this,

during the early stages of the Heaven's Feel, no matter what family it is, they will use spies for reconnaissance.

It's not like Kirei distrusts Tokiomi's information network, it's just that they have to be on guard for the possibility that the remaining two mystery masters are using wise measures to conceal themselves. If facing against an opponent with this kind of strategy, Kirei's Servant Assassin can utilize his powers to the greatest limit.

"You may leave. Assassin continue keeping watch outside. Be very cautious."

"Understood."

Receiving Kirei's command, Assassin once again assumed spirit form and left the room. For a Servant who is a spiritual entity to begin with, it is possible to shift freely between spirit form and physical form.

Assassin has the special ability of "Presence Concealment" that other Classes do not possess. He is unrivaled in concealed movement and tracking.

To Kirei, whose responsibility is not to pursue victory but to provide backup for Tokiomi, summoning Assassin was the best choice.

That is the battle plan.

First, let Kirei's Assassin go around thoroughly investigating the battle stratagem of other master’s and their Servants' weaknesses. After obtaining a method of certain victory against each enemy in this manner, Tokiomi's Servant will then be used to defeat each one accordingly.

Because of this, Tokiomi must summon a Servant possessing great offensive abilities. As for which Heroic Spirit he has his eye on, Kirei never heard him mention this.

"The holy relic I prepared will arrive tomorrow morning."

As if understanding Kirei's doubts from his expression, Tokiomi said so without waiting for him to ask.

"I found what I was expecting. The Servant I will summon would certainly be advantageous against all of the enemies. If it is a Heroic Spirit, then it will have no chance of victory against this guy."

Tokiomi, being secretly happy in this manner; his face was brimming with the unrivaled confidence he was born with.

"The summoning ceremony will be held tonight -- if no other masters are spying on us, Kirei, you can be present too, as well as your father."

"Father too?"

"Yes. If 'he' is successfully summoned, then our victory is assured. I want to share this happiness with everyone."

This sort of unconcealed haughty confidence shows what can be said to be Tōsaka Tokiomi's hereditary characteristic. Regarding his oversized ego, Kirei feels somewhat in awe, yet somewhat in admiration too.

Suddenly, Kirei noticed the pendulum's jewel. The jewel's movement on the Rollin paper did not cease, it was continuously writing.

"There seems to be more to come."

"Yeah, ah, this is the investigation regarding another matter. This isn't the latest information - it's probably regarding my request for him to investigate Einzbern's Master.

Information on the Einzbern family who's cut off all contact with the outside world is difficult to obtain even in London's Clock Tower, but Tokiomi has already mentioned before that there was a lead on that Master. Tokiomi rolled up the paper beside him and put it atop the writing table, then picked up the Rollin paper containing new text.

"...This was something that happened nine years ago. The Einzberns who have been proud of their bloodline's purity suddenly found a magus from the outside to be their son-in-law. This has even instigated much debate within the Association at the time, but the only one able to see the truth of this matter, other than me, would be the old head of the Matō household.

The magi of the Einzbern family who only excel in alchemy were not suited to combat since the start. This was also the contributing factor to their losses in the previous Heaven's Feel rituals. These people seem to have finally lost their patience.

This magus they found seems to really 'fit the requirements.'"

After browsing through the paper quickly while talking, Tokiomi passed the paper to Kirei. After seeing "Investigation report: Emiya Kiritsugu" as the title, Kirei's eyes narrowed slightly.

"This name... I've heard it somewhere before. Supposedly, this is a dangerous person."

"Oh, does the Holy Church also know of this? The 'Magus Killer' Emiya was really notorious at the time. Not belonging to the Association in appearance, but in fact was the Association's higher ups' killing tool."

"So, in the words of the church, he would be a sort of Executor, right?"

"Even worse than that in nature. He is a freelancing assassin who underwent special training to kill magi. Because only magi are most comprehensive of other magi, he will use methods most incompatible with the rules of magi to kill other magi... he is the sort of man who will utilize despicable measures nonchalantly."

There was obvious hatred in Tokiomi's voice, yet Kirei began to bear interest for this man called Emiya Kiritsugu. He did hear rumors about this man; it seems he has opposed the Holy Church in the past, and there have been people who told Kirei to be very careful of this man.

Kirei began reading the information passed on to him. Most of what was recorded was an investigation regarding Emiya Kiritsugu's battle strategy - the cases of missing persons and accidents believed to be magi he killed; but mainly, it was an analysis of his methodology. While reading, Kirei began to gradually understand why Tokiomi hates this man. Ambush and assassination was only the tip of the iceberg.

Planting a bomb in public, striking down an airplane with many passengers on board; these were the type of unbelievable cases reported. It is also extrapolated that the tragedies of the past reported as major acts of terrorism were in fact the criminal acts of Emiya Kiritsugu for the sake of killing one magus. Although there is no convictive evidence, looking at the information given, it is a very believable story.

Assassin; that word is very befitting. Magi opposing each other to the point of killing each other, these scenarios are common. However, it is purely a competition of magecraft and usually decided through a series of processes that abide certain combat regulations. Saying it like that, the Heaven's Feel also belongs in this category; although called a 'war,' it is not a chaotic death match, but rather a series of strict rules and regulations exist.

There isn't even a single line of text recording Kiritsugu having undergone a battle like this, using the 'regulations of magi'.

"The thing called magus exists outside of human law to begin with, and that's all the more reason to strictly obey the rules of our own world."

Tokiomi said so, his calm voice seething with anger.

"But this man Emiya completely ignores all rules. He does not have a bit of pride as a magus. This kind of man is unforgivable."

"What you said was... pride?"

"Yes. Even this man surely underwent strict training as a magus.

If that's the case, then he certainly has the faith to overcome and surmount difficulties. It is impossible to forget his original intent and desire, even after attaining success."

"..."

What Tokiomi said is wrong. Submitting oneself to brutal training even without any intent whatsoever, this kind of idiot exists in this world. Regarding this, Kirei understands better than anyone.

"— So why did this Emiya Kiritsugu become a killing tool?"

"That... it's probably because of money. After going into the Einzbern family, he's washed himself clean. He's already obtained enough money as to not worry about it for the rest of his life, so that is only reasonable - it should be written on that report, that guy did more than just assassinations. He seems to have done other stuff around the world any chance he gets for some extra money."

It's just as Tokiomi says, nearing the end of the report, other than magi related incidents, there are lots of other experiences of Emiya Kiritsugu. So that's how it is, Kiritsugu can be placed in most of the conflicts going on around the world; he's not only a killing tool, but also did a lot of work as a mercenary.

"...This document, can I borrow it to read in detail?"

"Ah, sure. If you can analyze it in detail for me, then it would be a huge help. I'm still busy preparing for the summoning ritual tonight."

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Kirei left the workshop in the basement and returned to the ground floor. In the hallway, he ran into a young girl battling with oversized luggage.

"Good afternoon, Rin."

Not wanting to especially entertain her, but merely greeting her normally. The girl stopped in her tracks and stared at Kirei with wide eyes. He has been in contact with Rin in this house for three years, yet the suspicion in the girl's eyes while regarding Kirei has not diminished.

"...Good afternoon. Kirei."

With a hardened voice, but still with the proper attitude, Rin returned Kirei's greeting. Although young, Rin already acts similar to her mother, her actions refined and ladylike. She's not just anyone, but rather Tōsaka Tokiomi's daughter. Being different from other students her age was perfectly natural.

"Going out? That luggage is huge."

"Yes. Starting today, we will go to grandpa's house for a bit. I'm even taking the cable car from that side to go to school."

Because the Heaven's Feel was imminent, Tokiomi decided to let his family temporarily live in the neighboring district--his mother-in-law's house.

The mother and daughter cannot be exposed to the battlefield, that is too dangerous. Of course, these are reasonable arrangements.

But his daughter Rin seems to be very unsatisfied about this. Although her features are fine, her cute little mouth is puffed up, showing that she's unhappy. Although she's to be a future lady, no matter what, she's still just a kid. She can't be expected to totally act to that point.

"Kirei, you're staying with father to help him fight, right?"

"Yes, as his apprentice, this is what I should be doing."

Rin is not a clueless child. As the Tōsaka magi's successor, she has already received Tokiomi's expert teaching. Regarding the imminent Fuyuki Heaven's Feel, she is equipped with some degree of knowledge.

As to why she has to go to her grandpa's house, she can understand the legitimate reason. But, what she's unsatisfied about is--after she's gone, Kirei's the only one left in the Tōsaka house and could do whatever he wants.

Rin has extraordinary respect for her father Tokiomi. Precisely for this reason, as the successor, Rin's dislike for Kirei is probably because he became Tokiomi's student first, learning magecraft from him.

"Kirei, can I trust you? Will you protect father to the end? Will you promise me that?"

"That is impossible. If this war was benign enough for me to promise you that, then there would be no reason for you and your mother to get out of harm's way, right?"

Kirei is unwilling to speak empty words to comfort her, and thus plainly spoke the truth. But Rin's eyes became fiercer, glaring at her impudent and shameless apprentice elder.

"…As I thought, I don't like you one bit."

Only when speaking upsetting words befitting her age, that's when Kirei has a favorable impression of this girl.

"Rin, don't ever speak such impolite words in front of others again. Otherwise, you will put the moral character of your father in suspect."

"This has nothing to do with father!"

Seeing as even father has been pulled out as a shield; Rin's anger caused her face to turn a profuse red. This is exactly what Kirei hoped to see.

"Listen up Kirei! If father is hurt because of your errors, I will definitely not forgive you! I —"

At that moment, with what can be said to be the best possible timing, Aoi's shadow appeared. Already done with her preparations, but because Rin didn't come, she came to check out the situation.

"Rin! What are you doing? With such a loud voice!"

"— Ah, that is, I —"

"Before her departure, she came to give me encouragement, lady."

Kirei pretended to be calm and purposely helped Rin, but Rin became even angrier. But she can't say anything in front of her mother, so she turned to leave.

"I'll help you with the luggage. Rin, that case is way too heavy for you."

"No! I can do it myself!"

Rin pulled at the box even more vigorously than before, and because of this mired into an even fiercer battle with the case, but despite everything, finally got it out the door. Kirei knows that acting this way would be very unlike a mature adult, but he still wanted to laugh at Rin whenever he had the chance to.

Aoi, who remained, gave Kirei a very respectful bow.

"Kotomine-san, I'll leave my husband in your hands. Please help him realize his wish."

"I will do my best, please don't worry."

The way Kirei sees it, Tōsaka Aoi is the perfect wife. Solemn and discreet, meticulous, understanding of her husband and never interfering, regarding loyalty as higher than love and has respect for duty - in short, she's the model of the perfect wife and mother from older times. In an era where the feminist movement has begun to soak through society, she's like a character carved from stone. Tokiomi has really picked a person most compatible with himself as his spouse.

Kirei stood at the door to see the mother and daughter off with his eyes, leaving not with a taxi, but a private car with Aoi at the steering wheel. Not only the chauffeur, but even all the servants, starting last week, have all been laid off. It is done to prevent from bringing harm to the innocent, and also as a kind of careful tactic against espionage. Tokiomi wasn't cautious enough to keep up his guard even against his servants; this suggestion was Kirei's, and Tokiomi was half forced to carry out this act.

Before the car left, Rin was shielded from her mother's eyes and stuck out her tongue at Kirei, making a face. Kirei laughed bitterly and saw them off with his eyes, then returned to the now empty mansion.

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Tokiomi has not yet left the basement workshop. Kirei, being the sole occupant of the otherwise empty living room, began to thoroughly read through the report regarding Emiya Kiritsugu.

He didn't understand why he had such intense interest in this strange magus he didn't even know. Perhaps it's because he derives some sort of feeling of pleasure from the loathing placed onto this man by his teacher Tokiomi.

The relationship of teacher and student maintained for three years in this house has always had a sense of satire about it.

As a teacher, Tokiomi cannot nitpick on Kirei's concentration in learning and speedy comprehension; originally a holy servant who detests magecraft, yet he has immense interest in all thaumaturgical fields. Kirei's use of what can be called 'a greedy desire for knowledge' to learn everything makes Tokiomi happy. Now Tokiomi's trust for Kirei is completely unshakable, even to the point of making his only daughter Rin show respect for Kirei as an elder apprentice.

But compared to Tokiomi's increasingly profound friendship, Kirei's heart became more and more desolate.

For Kirei, he's not studying magecraft because he likes it. Leading a long, pious life in the church, yet ending up with nothing in return; because of that, Kirei bet all his hopes on the new study which has exact opposite values to that of the church, that is all. But the result was a complete disaster. In the world of pursuing magecraft, Kirei did not find any enjoyment, nor did he gain any satiety. Quite the opposite, it seems to have lengthened the radius of the empty hole in his heart.

Tokiomi doesn't seem to have noticed Kirei's disappointment at all. The assessment of 'the same type of person as my father Risei' is completely correct. Tokiomi's appraisal of and trust for Kirei is exactly the same as Risei's.

There's always an uncrossable line between himself and people like his father and Tokiomi. Kirei understood this completely, and so that's probably why he has such interest for a character Tokiomi detests.

He thought, maybe this man Emiya Kiritsugu exists on 'the other side of the line.'.

Tokiomi's caution against Emiya Kiritsugu seems to be purely against his title of 'Magus Killer', so this investigation report created at the request of Tokiomi focused on 'his personal history of battles against magi', any other record not on this topic was rather simplistic.

But, looking at this man Kiritsugu's experiences in chronological order, Kirei began to gradually gain a belief.

This man's actions contain a high level of risk.

In the era of freelancing assassination before he was taken in by the Einzberns as their son-in-law, Kiritsugu expertly completed countless missions. But the pause between missions was clearly too short. Considering the time, he has for preparation and accepting missions, the only possible conclusion is that he is simultaneously executing several plans. And these plans are all parallel; he appears in the conflicts of various areas, and always when the conflict is the most heated, at the point of destruction.

As if he was suicidal, as if he had some sort of sickness driving him... the principle behind his actions is clearly self-destruction.

This can be said without question. This man Kiritsugu does not have a selfish heart, the risks of his actions and profiting from them do not match. It's impossible that he's the kind of freelancing assassin with money as the intent.

Then — what does he seek?

"..."

Unconsciously, Kirei put the report aside, propped his lower jaw on his hand, and sunk into deep thought. This man Emiya Kiritsugu has a turbulent life inconceivable by others, but Kirei doesn't see it as unrelated to himself.

A magus without pride, a man who lost his belief, Tokiomi assessed him as thus.

If that's the truth, Kiritsugu's intense experiences, as if seeking destruction... or can it be said as a journey of seeking a long-lost answer?

Then, the curtain on Kiritsugu's continuous battles fell suddenly nine years ago. That's because through continuous searching, he met with the Einzbern magi seeking victory in the Heaven's Feel in the northern lands.

That is to say, at that moment, he obtained his 'answer.'

Right now, Kirei anxiously anticipates his meeting with Emiya Kiritsugu. He has finally found the significance of his participation in the Fuyuki battle.

Even now, he has no interest in the Grail. But, if Kiritsugu broke a nine-year silence for it, Kirei has just gained the significance of coming here to participate in this fight which can dispel all difficulties.

He must ask this man. 'What is it that you are seeking that you would participate in this battle... what do you obtain from it in the end?'

Kotomine Kirei will confront Emiya Kiritsugu no matter what. Even if it's on a battlefield where both sides wager life and death.

-271:33:52

Matō Kariya’s mental strength had, in conclusion, withstood the bitter pain, but his physical body had reached its limit.

Within three months all his hair had turned white. His skin was covered with emerging lesions interspersed with regions devoid of the rosy color of living flesh, turning instead into a sepulchral shade of earthen grey. The poison named prana that circulated in his veins can be seen to expand beneath his semi-transparent flesh, as if his torso was harboring a crawling mess of inky black cracks.

Like so, his body collapsed at a rate faster than he had ever imagined. The impact was particularly heavy on the left side of his body and its nerves, so much so that at one stage his left wrist and ankle were completely paralyzed. A temporary rehabilitation program got them back to work, but the left hand still reacted slower than the right, and a quicker stride would result in a dragging left foot.

Palpitations due to his irregular pulse have become regulars for him. Solid food can also not be taken in; intravenous glucose injections were used as its substitute.

According to the theories of modern medicine, it is a matter of amazement that a creature in his state still continued to live and function. Although Kariya can still stand and walk it was, with a tint of irony, a gift granted to him by the prana that he, as a magus, bought with his life.

The crest worms that have been invading Kariya’s flesh have already grown into a form that can imitate the function of Magic Circuits. In order to maintain the life of their decaying possessor they are now desperately acting out their role.

If it is simply a matter of the amount of Magic Circuits, then Kariya have already possessed the prana needed for qualifying as a magus. It appears that his progress was even faster than what Matō Zōken had expected. In the end, the three scars of the Command Seals had blatantly shown up on Kariya's right hand. The Holy Grail also seems to have accepted him as the representative of the Matō family.

Based on Zōken's estimations, Kariya has about a month left to live. For Kariya, it seems that this amount of time is enough.

The Heaven's Feel has entered into its countdown stage. If all seven Servants are summoned the war may even begin tomorrow. The duration of the war, according to past experiences, should be about two weeks. Sometime before Kariya's death.

Yet, if Kariya activates his Magic Circuits, it means he will be inciting the crest worms. Indeed, then the burden placed on his body would be far greater than that of the other magi.

The worst-case scenario would be that, before the war has ended, the crest worms have already devoured their host.

Kariya does not only have to fight against the other six Masters. It could be said that his greatest enemy are the creatures hosted within him.

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That night, as Kariya approached the basement of the Matō residence to face the final test, he accidentally met Sakura in the corridor.

"…"

The frightened expression that emerged on Sakura's face when she first saw him slightly pricked Kariya's chest.

At this stage of affairs, although there is nothing to be done, Kariya was still pained to know that he was now an object of Sakura's fear.

'Oh, Sakura-Chan – were you scared?"

"… Um. Your face, what happened?"

“Ah. It’s just a little problem.”

The sight of his left eye has been completely eradicated yesterday. Like the nebulous eyeball that had undergone necrosis, the surrounding muscles also have fallen into paralysis. The eyelid and brow cannot be moved, neither; maybe the left side of his face was already showing signs of lifelessness, turning rigid as a fake mask. His reflection in the mirror frightens even him, let alone Sakura.

“Just a bit more, then I might be defeated by the ‘worms’ within me. Uncle is not as enduring as Sakura-chan.”

A bitter smile was intended but looked like a more gruesome feature was formed. Sakura became more scared and even curled her body up.

“– Uncle Kariya, you are like a different person now.”

“Ha ha, maybe that is the case.”

With a dry laugh as pretense the matter was vaguely passed over.

– I can say the same about you, Sakura.

Yes, Kariya comment wearily in his heart.

The Sakura that is now named Matō has also changed into a girl completely different from the Sakura that Kariya knew.

A gaze as hollow and dim as that of a doll. The various emotions behind those pair of eyes were never seen by him in this whole year. The innocent face of the girl that followed her elder sister Rin and played carelessly like a puppy had long ago disappeared.

This is understandable. Just consider the cruel training that Sakura undertook this year in order to become the successor of the thaumaturgy of the Matōs.

Sakura’s body does indeed have fitting potentials to become a magus. On this matter she was far better than Kariya and his elder brother Byakuya. Yet, it was inevitably a potential more appropriate for a magus of the Tōsaka brand of thaumaturgy, with fundamental differences to the thaumaturgy of the Matō.

Acclimatization was needed in order to allow Sakura’s body to adapt to the thaumaturgy of the Matō. The treatments of this so-called acclimatization

are the tortures that occurred in the underground worm storage of the Matō residence every day and night in the name of "education."

Children’s minds are immature.

They do not possess a firm resolve and the strength to turn their misery to anger. Confronted with a cruel fate, they were not provided with the choice of having a strong will. Moreover, as they have not lived through and comprehended life, ideals such as honor and hope are yet to be completely nurtured in them.

Therefore, in moments of despair children are more prone than adults to seal away their own mind, lock up their own heart.

Because they have not tasted the joy of life they can afford to discard. Because they have not understood the meaning of future they can sink into despair.

Kariya was forced to witness, with his own eyes, how in the duration of a year a girl had gradually shut out her heart due to the torments imposed upon her.

He had suffered from the piercing pain of the parasite worms eroding away his body and suffered from the worse and overwhelming guilt that sought to devour his soul.

Undoubtedly, he was one of the reasons that resulted in Sakura’s anguish. Kariya cursed Matō Zōken, cursed Tōsaka Tokiomi, and in the same time placed this curse upon himself.

The only consolation was that – the Sakura that has turned as introverted as a doll was only carefree when with Kariya, and even occasionally uttering words of innocence when they met. Whether it was a relationship shared by those who endure the same pain, or a friendship forged while she was still called Tōsaka Sakura, this girl continued to regard him as different compared to her ‘tutors,' Zōken and Byakuya.

“I don’t need to go to the worm storage room today. Grandfather said that’s because something more important is going to happen there.”

“Ah, I know. That’s why uncle is taking your place to go to the worm storage.”

Sakura tilted her head as if she was spying on Kariya when she heard his answer.

“Uncle Kariya, are you leaving for somewhere far away?”

With a child’s distinctively sharp intuition Sakura seemed to have detected Kariya’s fate. But he did not want to worry the young Sakura too much.

“Uncle’s going to be busy with important business for a while, so I won’t have much time to talk to Sakura-Chan like this.”

“Is that so…”

Sakura moved her sight away from Kariya and it immediately reverted back to a meaningless gaze, a gaze that was focused on some distant object that only she could see. Hurt at seeing Sakura like this, Kariya attempted to start another topic.

“Say, Sakura-Chan, shall we play together again when uncle’s work is finished? Together with your mother and big sister.”

"Mother, big sister..."

Sakura said dejectedly after a pause.

“...I don’t have people that I can call by those names anymore. Grandfather told me that I should treat them as no longer existing.”

“I see…” A reply with an indecisive voice.

Kariya knelt down in front of Sakura, and with his still mobile right hand held her shoulders softly in an embrace. With her head buried in his chest Sakura can no longer see Kariya’s face. He would therefore not be afraid of her seeing his crying countenance.

“Then, let’s bring Aoi-san and Rin-Chan from the Tōsaka family, and go somewhere far far away with just the four of us; like how we used to. What do you say about that?”

“– Can we see those people again?”

A weak voiced sounded within the enclosure of his wrist. Kariya tightened the hand that held Sakura and nodded.

“Of course, we can see them again. I promise you.”

Nothing else can be promised.

If it is possible, then other words can be used for another promise. If he could, Kariya longed to tell Sakura right now that she only has to endure a few more days before he delivers her from Matō Zōken's deadly grasp.

But that is not permitted.

As the only way she knew how to protect herself, Sakura had tried hard to paralyze her mind through despair and resignation. In order to counter the unbearable pain, the hapless girl can only destroy the sense of self that is still able to feel.

How can you say cruel words such as 'you should keep hoping' and 'you should look after yourself' to a child like this? These lines that confer temporary solace can only save the speaker. Giving her hope means to take away the armor named 'despair' that was cast upon her soul. If that is to happen, Sakura's young and tender mind would collapse within a night.

Therefore –

Although they both lived in the Matō residence Kariya had never claimed to be Sakura's 'savior.' He can only protect her by standing beside her, as an adult that is also been 'bullied' by Zōken and as powerless as Sakura.

"– Goodbye then. Uncle's gotta go now."

Kariya released Sakura, hoping that his tears have dried up. Sakura looked up solemnly at the decaying left side of Kariya's face.

"…Mm, bye, uncle Kariya."

Words of farewell seemed appropriate for this situation. She had accurately felt this even though she was only a child.

Kariya prayed piously in his heart as he watched Sakura's retreating spiritless figure – please do not let it be too late.

Kariya no longer cared about anything concerning himself. His life was already given to Aoi and Sakura, the pair of mother and daughter. If he had anything of his own that might be 'too late,' it is the possibility that he might be dead before he had taken the Grail.

The delay that he was truly worried in his heart was about Sakura. If Kariya can successfully gain the Holy Grail and deliver Sakura back to her mother, can the girl who had sealed herself up tightly with despair one day break apart her solid shell and once again enter the world outside?

The heartaches that Sakura endured this year would undoubtedly follow her throughout her life, but he hoped it would gradually heal as time went on. He hoped that her heart was not given torments that equated to a deadly blow.

All that is left for him to do is to pray. The one that can heal the wounds in this girl's heart is not Kariya. There is not much time left for him; he is unable to take up that job.

That is a job for those whom, in the future, are guaranteed of their lives.

Kariya turned around and slowly, but resolutely, took a step on the staircase leading towards the worm storage room underground.

-270:08:57

In a clearing within a bush at a corner of the small mountainous town of Fuyuki, Waver Velvet began his preparation of the summoning ritual after making sure that he was completely alone.

Waver's nerves were held extremely taut the entire day due to the incessant crowing of the chickens, so much so that a ritual of purification of the mind was needed before the conduction.

The shape of the magic circle has to be drawn on the ground while the dripping chicken blood was still warm. He had practiced the procedure many times, drawing the four encircling patterns of departure within erasure inside the summoning circle.

No mistakes must be made.

"Shut. Shut. Shut. Shut. Shut. Five perfections for each repetition. And now, let the filled sigils be annihilated in my stead!"

Waver carefully spread the chicken blood on the ground as he chanted the incantation.

In the underground workshop of the Tōsaka residence in the same small mountainous town, the same preparations were being made for the same ritual.

“Ye first, O silver, O iron. O stone of the foundation, O Archduke of the Contract. Hear me in the name of our great teacher, the Archmagus Schweinorg.

Let the descending winds be as a wall. Let the gates in all directions be shut, rising above the crown, and let the three-forked roads to the Kingdom revolve.”

Tōsaka Tokiomi chanted the incantation loudly as he inscribed the magic circle, using not the blood of sacrificial victims but the molten essence of magical gems. To prepare for this day, Tōsaka have liberally used up all the gems that were full of prana stockpiled in his hoard.

Beside him were the Kotomine father and son – Risei and Kirei.

Kirei gazed intently at the holy relic placed on the altar. At first glance it looked like a broken fragment of a mummy, but in fact it was claimed to be the fossil of the skin that was shed by the first snake in the world in ancient times countless eons before.

Kirei cannot help but feel a wave of fear at the thought of the Heroic Spirit it would summon.

Tokiomi’s reasons for his confidence were finally understood. No Servant can defeat the Heroic Spirit that Tokiomi have chosen.

At the same time, in the distant castle of the Einzberns, Emiya Kiritsugu was examining the completed state of the summoning circle scribed on the floor of the ceremony room.

“Would such a simple ritual suffice?”

For Irisviel, who was standing aside overlooking the procedure, it was surprising that the preparations were so plain.

“Maybe you are disappointed, but the summoning of Servants never needed an extravagant spiritual evocation ceremony.”

Kiritsugu explained as he carefully checked for twists and smudges on the patterns drawn with mercury.

“Because it is in fact not the power of the magus that summons the Servant, but the power of the Holy Grail. As a Master I am only a cord that connects the Heroic Spirit with the world we reside in, and then merely provide him with prana necessary for materialization in this world.”

As if satisfied with the completed state of the summoning circle, Kiritsugu nodded and stood up. The holy relic was placed on the altar – the sheath of the legendary holy sword.

“According to this, victory should be within our hands.”

“Have you accurately memorized the incantations of summoning?”

Matō Zōken reminded Kariya again and again for safety’s sake. The latter nodded in the darkness.

Full of the foul odor of rot and dampness, a green darkness as that of the depth of the sea. This is the worm storage hidden deep beneath the ground of the Matō residence that stood on the hill of the small mountainous town.

“That’s good. Only, midway through the incantation, add two more lines of incantations.”

“What do you mean?”

Zōken smiled ominously towards Kariya’s confused expression.

“Isn’t it obvious? Kariya, you should know that as a magus, your abilities are not just one or two notches below the other Masters. It will affect the basic abilities of the Servant.

If that’s the case, it can only be amended through the Servant’s Class, and we must raise the parameter from the root up.”

Predetermining the Class of the Servant through the alteration of the summoning incantations.

Usually, the assignment of Servant Classes is inevitably decided by the summoned Heroic Spirit’s own attributes. However, there are exceptions; two Classes can be designated by the summoner beforehand.

One of them is Assassin. The Heroic Spirit that belongs to this Class can be assumed as a group of killers that inherited the name of Hassan I Sabah.

And the other class is for all Heroic Spirits and can be manifested as long as the summoner incorporates the required foreign ingredients. Therefore –

“This time, give the summoned Servant the attribute of ‘Mad Enhancement’!”

Zōken declared loudly with an overjoyed face, as if welcoming the disastrous implications contained within it.

“Kariya, as the Master of Berserker, fight for me with all that you’ve got.”

On that day, incantations from different lands and aimed at different entities were chanted almost simultaneously, a harmony so coincidental it can hardly be regarded as an accident of chance.

For all the magi have the same hope.

A hope about a miracle. The summons pronounced to the heroes on the other side of the universe by these humans, who will brutally slaughter each other to achieve this miracle, were ringing out from the earth at the same time.

“Set –”

This is the moment that will present the greatest test to him as a magus. If he lost, he would even lose his life. Waver felt this acutely, but he was not a bit afraid.

A passion that desires strength. A determination that relentlessly pursues his goal. Based on those qualities, Waver Velvet is undoubtedly an outstanding magus.

“– Set

Let thy body rest under my dominion, let my fate rest in thy blade.

If thou submit to the call of the Holy Grail, and if thou wilt obey this mind, this reason, then thou shalt respond.”

The sensation of prana that surrounded his body. The malevolent chill and agony caused by the slithering and circulation of the Magic Circuits within one’s corporal being is something that no magi can escape from.

Waver bit down on his teeth as he continued to chant the incantation.

“– I make my oath here. I am that person who is to become the virtue of all Heaven. I am that person who is covered with the evil of all Hades.”

Kiritsugu’s sight darkened.

The Emiya family crest, that was passed down through the generations and carved on his back, began to separately chant the incantation as individual entities in order to support Kiritsugu's thaumaturgy. Kiritsugu's heart, in a dimension that escaped his mind's control, began to beat rapidly like a hurrying clock hand.

His flesh that was tormented by the prana gathered from the air had already forgotten its functionalities as a human; instead, it had turned into a component of the mysterious ceremony, into a circuit that purely connected the ethereal with the material.

Kiritsugu gave no thought to the severe pain created by this discord that was enough to make one want to scream out loud and concentrated on pronouncing his incantation. Even the presence of Irisviel, who stood beside him holding her breath, was no longer present in his consciousness.

Adding the forbidden alien ingredient in the incantations of summoning, Kariya included two lines of incantations that would rob the sanity of the summoned Heroic Spirit and demote the hero to a level of a berserker.

"– Yet, thou serve with thine eyes clouded in chaos. Thou bound in the cage of madness. I am he who commands those chains –"

Kariya is different from other magi in that his Magic Circuits are made from other organisms that lived within him as parasites. The anguish necessary for inciting them and activating his Circuits are incomparable with that suffered by other magi. As he chanted the incantations his limbs twitched in spasms, and blood seeped out from his shattered capillaries.

Sanguineous tears flew from the remaining wholesome right eye, dripping down his cheek.

Even so, Kariya did not lax in his concentration.

Thinking about the duty that he bore on his back – then he would not shrink back at this moment.

"Thou seven heavens, clad in a trinity of words, come past they restraining rings, and be thou the hands that protect the balance –!"

With this as the end of his prayers, Tokiomi felt that the acceleration of the prana that raced in his body had reached its uttermost limit.

Thunder and lightning roared, accompanied with rolling clouds bore on a mighty wind. In the pressure of a gale that wouldn’t even allow onlookers such as Kirei to open their eyes, the patterns of the summoning circle glimmered with brilliant light.

Finally, the Magic Circuits have connected with the plane that is not of men… from the dazzling light that endlessly shone forth, a golden silhouette of an upright man emerged. Awed with such august solemnity, Father Risei muttered dreamily despite himself.

“…We’ve won, Kirei. Our battle is won…”

The wish was passed onto them like this.

Arriving from the other side and landing here, a legendary illusion wrapped in tornado and lightening.

Originally of humankind but separated from the mortal plane. Elevated to the level of elementals through powers not of men. The place where the supernatural primates gathered… from the Throne of Heroes that had its power of the Gods suppressed, the Heroic Spirits weaved from the dreams of countless ordinary men descended on the earth at the same time.

Then –

In a forest in the night, on a stone stool enveloped by the darkness, at each of these locations someone now asked in a majestic voice:

“I ask thee, art thou the Master that called me?”

Act 2

Act 2

-268:22:30

Waver had expected the day to end at the peak of triumph with a successful summoning.

After the previous night spent in a fierce battle with the cackling chickens, he had studied in his bed this night, satisfied with the pleasant weariness of accomplishment.

And —

"... How, did this happen?"

With a dry wind blowing strongly over the public park of the Shinto area, Waver sat on the bench, curling in the lonely coldness. He still couldn't understand, ‘’just how on Earth did my plan go wrong’’?

The summoning was a success. That was a satisfactory response.

Along with the successful summoning, the status of the invited Servant was still imprinted in Waver's consciousness. He was of the Rider class. Although that isn't one of the three major knights, his basic abilities still were at a more than average level. Without a doubt, he was a powerful Servant.

The moment he saw the silhouette of the big frame slowly rising from the summoning circle, behind the white smoke, Waver was so exalted he almost came in his pants.

... Thinking about it, the situation had turned for the worse at around that point.

From Waver's knowledge, a "familiar" is the puppet of its summoner.

An existence that can barely survive in the present world by relying on the prana supplied by the magus.

A wooden doll that can be used as the practitioner pleases. That's what a familiar is, essentially. So, he had guessed a Servant would be basically the same, more or less.

But that thing that came out of the summoning circle—

Right from the start, Waver's soul was overtaken by the sharpness of the eyes, glowing like a blaze.

The instant the eye contact was made, he had instinctively sensed that the Servant was a mighty one and was overwhelmed like a small animal.

The overwhelming presence of the giant blocked his view. Leaving out the quibbles, he sure is a HUGE guy.

The overwhelming presence of the giant blocked his view. From the body odor he picked up, the fragrant of the muscular stature, Waver understood. Never mind the quibble about him being a ghost or a familiar, he sure is a HUGE guy.

Waver knew that the Heroic Spirits invited by the Grail are not only free spirits; they gain a material "body" to exist in the present world. But, the cluster of massive muscles that was the actual entity, not a virtual image or a shadow, the feeling of impending threat, was beyond Waver's imagination.

No matter what, Waver hated the great man.

It's not just that Waver was, still, a bit shorter than an average person. Certainly, his body tended to be frail, because he had done nothing but study in his childhood, and had had little time to forge his body, but he didn’t think it was a weakness. Rather, Waver had pride in polishing up his intellect.

But, the truth of such an obvious thing wouldn't get through the big man's muscles. No matter what, the time lag before such a game with a rock for a soul would lift his fist and swing it down is way too short. There is no time to expand into a discussion however brief, and there is also no future in using magecraft.

That is— once he is approached by the fist of that pack of muscles.

"... So, I'm asking you. You must be my Master, right?"

"Hah?"

That was the big man's second question. A booming voice that could shake up the Earth.

He had been overpowered beyond his senses from the first question asked with a voice you couldn't fail to hear.

"Ah— Yes! I-I-I-I'm, I mean, I am! I am your Master, I'm called, Waver Velvet! I mean, that's my name! I'm your Master!!"

Though it really was useless in more than one way, Waver stuck to bluffing with all his might to stand up to the muscles in front of him. ... Even so, he felt dominated already by the physique of the unaware giant.

"Hm, then the contract is complete. So, boy, can you lead me to some archives immediately?"

"Hah?"

Waver was blown out of his mind for the second time.

"Some books, I'm saying! Books."

The giant Servant repeated himself gloomily, leaning toward Waver, stretching a strong arm that looked like the root of a pine tree.

I'm going to be killed— Waver immediately thought, feeling like he was floating. The giant had seized his neck and carelessly lifted him. Waver hadn't noticed until then that he had fallen flat on the ground. He realized that was the reason his interlocutor had, mid-way, started looking even more like a giant.

"If you are one of those magi, you should be able to provide some archive? Now, show me around. We need to prepare for war."

"W, war...?"

Now that the giant mentioned it, Waver simply had totally forgotten about the Holy Grail War.

Having lived as a blatant freeloader in a private house, Waver had no kind of archive, and reluctantly led Rider to the library.

The central library of the city of Fuyuki was in the public park in the Shinto area and was still under construction. Frankly, it felt awkward to walk through the city in the middle of the night —with the recent strange murder case, the police frequently announced a state of emergency— Waver felt that what the big muscles in front of him could do was a bigger crisis than being questioned by the patrolling police.

Fortunately, as soon as they came out of the grove, the giant turned invisible.

That must be an ability the Servants have, to go into spirit form. Waver felt relieved as he wouldn't look suspicious walking along a big man with armored cloth, but he still felt the pressure of being followed by that overbearing presence.

Luckily, they didn't meet anyone when crossing the big bridge of Fuyuki into the Shinto area; reaching the public park, Waver pointed at the modern architecture in the back.

"There should be as many books as you want over there."

Then, the oppression that was weighing on Waver softly went away. Apparently, Rider was entering the building in spirit form.

—And so, it had been 30 minutes since he had been left behind. Released from the threat he didn’t comprehend; he was finally able to calmly sort his thoughts.

"... How, did this happen?"

Waver buried his head in his hands, remembering his shameful behavior from earlier. However powerful, the Servant is his contractor. As the Master, Waver is the one who has to seize leadership.

The Servant Waver had summoned definitely was strong. That was a given, considering the history of the relic he had stolen from Kayneth.

Heroic spirit Alexander. Also known as Iskandar or Alexandros.

The reason he was known under several names depending on the pronunciation of the land was that he was the heroic "King of Conquerors". Succeeding to the throne of Macedonia at only 20 years old, leading ancient Greece in an invasion of Persia, then through Egypt, up to western India during the great "eastern campaigns” and reaching the success of a great hero in barely 10 years. He literally is the "great king" who built the era known as the Hellenistic civilization.

Even though he is such a great man amongst great men, once he is summoned as a Servant, he cannot oppose his Master. The first reason to this is that in the present world, he depends on Waver. If Waver ever stops supplying him with prana for him to remain in the present era, he will have no choice but to disappear.

There is a reason why all Servants answer the summoning of a Master—that is, why they participate in the Holy Grail War alongside their Master. Namely, just like the Masters, they want the Grail. Hoping to get that wish-granting machine, they also have to fight until only one remains, so that they will obtain the grace of the Grail along with the Master they accompany. In other words, the cooperation between the Master and the Servant is natural.

Furthermore, the master’s also hold the trump cards that are the Command Seals.

All three Seals can be used one by one for 3 absolute orders. That is what defines the relationship between the Servant and the Master. The Servant cannot oppose an order from the Command Seals, even if it is something as unreasonable as an order to self-destruct. That is the central point of the contract system made up by one of the "three families of the beginning", the Makiris.

On the other hand, the Master who uses up all 3 of his Command Seals is exposed to the danger of rebellion from his Servant; but it is a risk that can be avoided if the Master acts carefully.

Yes, as long as the Command Seals are carved on this hand— suppressing the irritation in his stomach, Waver, in a trance, stared at his right hand, chuckling— he might be a huge mass of muscles, but he has no reason to oppose the magus Waver Velvet.

As soon as that Servant comes back, I must tell that inviolable rule to his face...

Suddenly, while Waver was thinking, a breaking sound heartily roared.

Jumping out of surprise, he turned around as the closed shutter of the library hall were being distorted and torn off. The one who was calmly walking there, materialized under the moonlight, was none other than Waver's Servant, Rider.

With how dark the forest had been, this was actually the first time he could clearly see how he looked in this light.

His height easily exceeded 2 meters. His unprotected arms and thighs spread out from his bronze armor, and from the size of the muscles all over his body he looked like he could kill a bear with his bare hands. On his sternly chiseled features there were eyes with a dazzling glow and burning red hair and beard. The thick mantle dyed in a similar red, with fringes like his cuffs, was luxuriously decorated, looking just like a curtain wrapping the stage of a theater.

The magnificent posture of that big man in front of the modern library made a somewhat funny combination, but Waver took no interest in that as the alarms resounding like a shrill got him ready to flee.

"Idiot! Stupid, stupid, stupid! What were you thinking, kicking the shutters like that! Why aren't you in spirit form like when you entered!?"

Rider strangely smiled out of good humor, holding out two books at the defiant Waver.

"I couldn't pick up this when in spirit form, could I?"

The books were one with a thick hardcover and a thin one. Apparently, Rider had taken them from the library. But his Master couldn't afford to disturb public order for something so trivial.

"Don't be slow! Run! We have to run!"

"How unsightly to be that flustered. You look like a thief or something."

"What thief, what's wrong with you!"

Rider was astonished by the threat in Waver's yell.

"You're greatly misunderstood. Those who run away under cover of the night are night burglars. Walking away victoriously is what the King of Conquerors does after looting."

You just can't discuss anything with him, Waver thought, scratching at his head madly. At any rate, Rider apparently wanted to parade through the night with those two books, looking like a suspicious cosplayer, with no intention of turning back to spirit form.

At the end of his wits, Waver rushed to Rider, picking the two books from his hand.

"You're done, now, right!? Now disappear! Disappear right now! Disappear immediately!"

"Ooh, then I'll leave this to you. You don't have to repeat yourself like that."

Satisfied, Rider nodded then became invisible again.

But Waver still couldn't feel relieved. The alarm of the library had to reach some security firm. You wouldn't know how long it would take for security guards to rush in.

Oh, what the heck, who cares.

"Ah, damn— How— did this happen, man!?"

Waver didn't know how many times he had lamented like that this night, but he just ran like hell.

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When he reached the promenade on the border of the broad bridge of Fuyuki, he felt he had run enough to be safe.

"Ha—, ha—, ha—, ..."

As someone who usually neglected himself, Waver felt his heart was on the verge of bursting from running such a hellish distance. Without the strength to even stand up, he knelt on the roadside— and took another look at the books Rider took from the library.

"... An anthology of Homer's poetry? And... A world map? Why?"

The luxurious book in a hardcover was from the famous poet of ancient Greece. The other thin book was a color print you would use for school.

From behind a puzzled Waver, a stern arm suddenly stretched out to pick the atlas up by the fingertips.

Once again with a physical body, Rider heavily sat down cross-legged on the road and, in a clatter, started to turn the pages of the atlas taken back from Waver.

"Hey Rider, when you mentioned preparations for war..."

"You can't start a war without a map. Isn't it obvious?"

Apparently pleased, Rider's face lit up in a grin, and he stared at the content of the atlas.

"Apparently the end of the world has been discovered, and it even rolls up in a sphere... I see, that's what we have when we draw the round Earth on paper..."

As far as Waver knows, when a Heroic Spirit is summoned as a Servant by the Grail, they receive minimum information so that their knowledge doesn't conflict with the current era. That means that even this ancient one should understand that the Earth is round. So, Waver couldn't quite understand why Rider had acted like a thief to get something like a map.

"So... Hey boy, where are Macedonia and Persia?"

"..."

Waver felt discouraged at Rider's usual arrogance in calling his Master "boy" instead of saying his name; still, he pointed his finger at a part of the atlas. At that moment—

—

"Wahhahhahaha!!"

Waver was again dumbstruck by Rider's excited burst of laughter.

"Hahahah! That's small! Only that on such a big Earth! Hm, good! I was worried by an era where there is no unknown land anymore... But if it's that big, then I'm fine!"

Suitable for his big frame, Rider's laughing voice was grand. Waver felt he'd rather face an earthquake or a tornado than oppose a man of that size.

"Good, good! I'm excited! ... And us, boy, where are we on this map?"

Nervously, Waver pointed to Japan at the far East. Rider gave a groan of admiration, and,

"Hoho—h, at the opposite of the round Earth... Hm. That too is very pleasing. Our objective is even clearer, then."

Grimly stroking his chin, he gave a satisfied nod.

"... Objective?"

"First we go halfway around the globe. Westward, straight west. We take over all the countries on the way. Upon my triumphal return in Macedonia, I will make all the people in my land celebrate my revival. Fufhuhu. How do you like that?"

Dumbstruck for a moment, Waver roared, still dizzy from anger.

"What the hell did you come here for! The Holy Grail War, the Grail!"

Rider sighed, bored by Waver's threatening attitude.

"But that’s just the outset. What's the fuss about—"

Rider sounded as if it had only just now occurred to him.

"Right, the Grail, I should have asked about that first. Boy, what would you do of the Grail?"

Unable to read Rider's slow tone, Waver felt a chill he couldn’t describe.

"... Why the change? Why do you ask?"

"I need to make sure of it. In case you too want to conquer the world, then that'll make you my enemy, right? There is no need for two supreme rulers."

It was highly unreasonable of the Servant to say that so carelessly over his shoulder, almost turning his back to the Master and his Command Seals; yet Waver shuddered violently from the hints of cruelty in the big man's audacious voice. The overwhelming fear made him forget his fundamental superiority as a Master.

"Th, that's stupid! The world, I don't..."

Choking until then, Waver suddenly remembers the necessity of keeping his dignity.

"Conquering the world— Fuh, I have no interest in such a vulgar goal!"

"Hoh?"

Rider’s expression completely changed, staring at Waver with great interest.

"Do you mean that there is an aspiration greater than wanting the world for a young man? That's interesting. Do tell me."

Waver sneered, then, with all his courage, started speaking haughtily.

"I... What I wish for, is only to be judged equitably. To renew the impression of my colleagues at the Clock Tower, who never acknowledged my talent—"

Before he could finish speaking, an unequalled shock hit Waver.

Roughly at the same time, he heard Rider roar in his loud voice "That's small!", but the shock and the roar were so equally strong that Waver couldn't tell the difference.

In fact, Rider hadn't particularly put more strength than for slapping a mosquito; but that was too strong for the short and fragile magus, and Waver spun like a top then collapsed on the ground.

"Small! That's puny! Ridiculous! Is that all the ambition you would risk your life in battle for? And you're my Master? That’s really sad!"

As if he couldn't accept it, Rider proclaimed so to the magus with an amazed expression, far from anger but practically lamenting.

"a— uh—"

Waver had never been confronted with such straightforwardness and violence. Being hit by the truth struck Waver's pride even more than the pain of his cheek.

Waver's lips shook with rage, the color drained from his face, but Rider didn't give it any consideration at all.

"If you want respect from others so much, right... I'll tell you boy, use the power of the Grail to grow by a good 30 centimeters. When you'll have a higher view over things, yeah, you will be looking at most people from above."

"You... you... u"

That was the greatest humiliation to him. More than rage, Waver felt dizzy as if suffering from anemia, his whole-body trembling.

Unforgivable. That was plainly unforgivable.

That big man, a Servant, nothing more than an attendant, had completely denied Waver's pride and got away with it. Even a god wouldn't forgive such an insult. To Waver's dignity—

On Waver's right hand, clenched so tightly his nails could tear his palm— power flowed into the three Seals carved on the back.

'By these Command Spells — guardian of the order of the Grail — may that man, my Servant —'

May Rider... make him what, exactly?

Of course, he hadn't forgotten why he left the Clock Tower, why he came in this remote countryside in the far East.

It was all to gain the Grail. That's why he summoned a Servant. Such a crisis with that Heroic Spirit he bounded with may happen twice. After the third time— the Command Seals are gone. That means a decisive defeat as a Master.

The first of these serious situations could not be right now, could it? Not even one hour after the summoning?

Ashamed, Waver looked downward and breathed deeply several times; then by natural reasoning and calculation, he shut down the irritation in his heart.

Impatience leads nowhere. Certainly, Rider's attitude is hardly forgivable; but the Servant hasn't opposed his Master yet, nor has he disregarded any order.

Waver can brandish his whip only three times to hit this wild beast. Isn't it careless to use it when only barked at?

Having regained his composure, Waver finally looked up again. Rider was still sitting on the ground, disparaging his Master; or rather, having even forgotten his master’s existence, he was reading the atlas. Waver spoke at his incredibly wide back.

"If you can just get the Grail, then I have no complaint. I don't care what you will do after that. You can fly wherever you want, Macedonia or the South Pole."

Fu—m. Rider breathed dispiritedly —or indifferently, you couldn't tell with his nasal breathing.

"... Anyway. You're sure you have your priorities, right? You will seriously participate in the Grail war?"

"Ah, I got it already, yeah."

Rider lifted his face from the atlas and looked at Waver from over his shoulder with a depressed grumble.

"The first thing is to beat 6 Heroic Spirits, right? That sounds troublesome, but certainly, without the Grail, I can't start anything. Rest assured. I'll get that treasure."

"..."

His speech was calm and composed, but Waver was not completely convinced.

Of course, that Heroic Spirit was not a deception. As far as Waver can grasp by being a Master, the Servant he had been granted has outstanding abilities.

But in a conflict, Servants don't only compete on skills. The Holy Grail War isn't something so nice that you can move on with big muscles.

"You seem very confident, but what are your chances of victory?"

With a daring provocation, Waver put forth all his bluff to scowl at Rider. ‘’I'm a Master, of course I can afford a high-handed attitude’’; that's what he is thinking.

"So, you say you want to see my power?"

Catching his glance, Rider changed to a quiet tone that somehow made Waver uneasy.

"Yes, that's right. Isn't it obvious? I need proof that I can trust you."

Laughing from his nose, the giant Servant pulled his sword from the scabbard at his waist. It was a valuable sword splendidly arranged, but it didn't feel like it had the prana of a Noble Phantasm in itself. Yet, when Rider took the sword, the dangerous atmosphere slowly made Waver uneasy. He can't be thinking of murdering me for my loudmouth...?

Without noticing his Master trembling violently, Rider lifted his naked sword overhead,

"By this one strike, I, Alexander, King of Conquerors, claim for supremacy!"

Having loudly called out to the empty sky, he violently swung down his blade at the empty space.

Just then, a thundering roar and a tremor shook the riverbed at night like a thunderbolt, in a magnificent shock.

His guts turned around, Waver lost balance and tumbled on the ground for the second time. If Rider's blade wasn't striking at anything, just what did it cut—

Waver saw it. The empty space torn apart, like a gaping mouth, and the absurdly powerful thing that appeared there.

And, Waver remembered just what a Servant is.

In the legend of a hero, there is not only the man that was the hero, but the anecdotes about him, his arms and weapons: all of this is the "symbol" of his existence. Those "symbols" are the ultimate mysteries that the Servant, the

embodiment of the Heroic Spirit, carries as a trump card. Those are the deadly weapons commonly called "Noble Phantasms".

Thus— there is no mistake. That which appeared at the empty space struck by Rider, that must be, without a doubt, his Noble Phantasm. Hidden in this existence, the density of the outrageous magical power outside of normality: Waver can grasp that. That was a miracle that had transcended humanity, transcended magecraft.

"That's how I struck the shaft and got this. The offering to Zeus from the king Gordius. ... It must be because the reputation of this that I landed the Rider class."

With a smile glowing with pride in front of that weapon, Rider didn't even sound like he was boasting; that must be the proof he has used it regularly, putting an immense faith in it.

"So, that here was only the beginning. The Noble Phantasm I really rely on is yet something else. Well, when the opportunity appears, I'll show you. If I meet a formidable opponent worthy of it, that is."

In awe, Waver viewed Rider in a new light. Precisely because he is a magus, he understands the destructive power of the Noble Phantasm in front of him. Compared to a modern-day weapon, that would rival a strategic bomber. He would transform the whole Shinto area into scorched earth if he was left wild for not even an hour.

There is no doubt left. Rider here is the strongest Servant Waver wished for. His might already surpasses Waver's imagination. If there is an enemy this man cannot defeat, then it has to be an existence that cannot be taken down even by divine punishment.

"Hey there boy, what's with the pale face, I haven't even begun yet."

Feeling malicious, Rider speaks to the fallen Master.

"If you want the Grail quickly, we should locate one or two Heroic Spirits rapidly. I'll immediately trample them. ... In the meantime, I can look at the atlas to kill boredom, you're fine with that, right?"

His soul having left his face, Waver slowly nodded.

-221:36:01

Sealed in ice, the furthermost Einzbern castle.

That day, the old castle deep in the mountains, where people do not go, quietly preserving the lives of ancient magi, was released from the snowstorm.

It can't be reached until the sky cleared up, but it is remarkably brighter than the days when the sky whitens up in snow. There are no flying birds or green plants on the soil of winter, but plenty of light.

On those days, however busy or tired the father is, they go out together in the forest outside the castle. That was the first unwritten rule between Ilyasviel von Einzbern and Emiya Kiritsugu.

"Alright, today, I will not lose!"

Saying so, the exulted Ilyasviel quickly moves into the forest before her father. She is pitiful with her small boots in the thick snow, but her fidgety eyes don't miss anything of the surrounding trees, not careless for one minute. Right now, the girl was in the midst of a fierce battle with her father.

"Oh, here's one. The first for today."

Hearing the triumphing Kiritsugu behind her, the eyes of the surprised Ilyasviel changed into the color of anger as she turned around.

"No way! Where? I can't have missed it!"

Returning a bold smile to his beloved daughter red with vexation, Kiritsugu pointed at a twig above his head. From a frost branch of walnut, a humble winter sprout was sticking out.

"Fuhhuhu, I get the first point. Let's keep that rhythm."

"I won't lose! I swear I won't lose today!"

The open competition between the father and the daughter in the winter forest is the search for the first walnut sprouts in winter. This year's score for Ilya is 12 victories, 9 defeats, one tie. The total count for Ilya is 427, against 374 for Kiritsugu. The champion was under a heavy pressure.

Ilyasviel had to hurry. Watching over her, Kiritsugu couldn't stop smiling bitterly. Checking one by one which winter sprout her father found, the girl

can see her impending death for today. Apparently, today is the day she will have to reveal her skills.

"Ah, here. Ilya found one too~"

Kiritsugu giggled wickedly from behind the merry Ilya.

"Fuhuhu, daddy found a second one too."

This time, Ilya sprang like a sprayed cat.

"Show me! Show me!?"

This time, her girlish pride is at stake if she wants to claim she doesn't miss anything. Actually, she didn't miss any. Only the one she is up against is childishly cunning.

Ilya's expected reaction, 10 seconds later, had Kiritsugu suppress his laughter as he pointed at what he said was his "second" winter bud.

"Eh—? That branch doesn't have walnuts, right?"

What Kiritsugu pointed at is a branch Ilya hadn't considered it to be her target until then.

"No no, Ilya, this branch is a wingnut, a variety of walnut. So that too is the winter bud of a walnut."

As if she had been tricked by a fox, Ilyasviel remained silent for 2 or 3 seconds, then she shouted, her cheeks all red.

"Not fair, not fair not fair not fair! Kiritsugu, that was mean!"

As a matter of fact, he was indeed unfair. Since before the last time, Kiritsugu was counting the wingnuts with the walnuts. Not only was it fake, it was indeed a foul play.

"Oh, but if daddy doesn't do that, he'll never win."

"You can't! It doesn't count if it's a walnut only Kiritsugu knows!"

An extremely angry Ilyasviel starts pounding on her father's knees.

"Hahaha, but, Ilya, isn't it a new opportunity to learn something? In fact, wingnuts aren't edible like walnuts, remember that."

Ilyasviel growls at him, not caring about it at all.

"If you are so unfair, then Ilya won't play with you, Kiritsugu!"

"That bothers me— sorry, sorry, I apologize."

From the ultimatum, Kiritsugu apologized obediently. With that, Ilyasviel gradually regains her good humor.

"You won't cheat again, you promise?"

"I swear, I swear. The wingnuts are gone."

But I still have the field nuts... Kiritsugu snickered silently.

Ilyasviel, who didn't know how to distrust people yet, threw out her chest in pride, nodding with satisfaction at her incorrigible father.

"Fine. Then I'll challenge you again. The champion must always accept a challenge."

"Yes. You honor me, princess."

In sign of allegiance, for today's walnut hunt, Kiritsugu then played the horse.

"Ahahah! That's high!"

Riding on her father's shoulders was by far what Ilyasviel liked best. Kiritsugu's long legs can even cross the deep snow Ilyasviel can't walk in. With a higher point of view, she could also hunt walnuts more efficiently.

"Here we go!"

Kiritsugu comes out of a grove, his daughter straddling on his neck. The thrill makes Ilyasviel kick up and laugh merrily.

Such disdain for her father's shoulders made him sad.

Having no experience in raising children before Ilyasviel, Kiritsugu doesn't know how they grow up. But he understands that it isn't normal for his daughter, who turns 8 this year, to weigh 15 kilos.

Perhaps, the absurd adjustments she received at birth are the reason. To Kiritsugu and Irisviel, it was obvious she would be late in reaching adulthood. Will her body turn into that of an adult as years pass or not?

No, rather, they had no hope. As a magus, Kiritsugu has already closed his ruthless diagnosis. There is 80 to 90% chances that Ilyasviel's growth will stop before her secondary sex characteristic appear.

Even so, rather than seeing her future as bad luck, she must have plenty of happiness— that wish is only the parents' ego. Yet, the pain of that thought drilling his chest was proof of the love of the man named Kiritsugu.

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From a window of the castle, a pair of jade eyes were watching over the small figures of the father and daughter playing at the entrance of the forest.

The young woman standing at the window is far from being weak or transient. She has blonde hair visibly light and soft, and wears an old styled dress wrapped around her slender physique; that evidently suited a young woman secluded in her room, but the atmosphere surrounding her stiffened the air in the room by her just standing there with her intense rigor. Although, rather than the coldness of ice, she has the coolness of a clear pure stream. She was one that somehow doesn't fit the winter scenery of the melancholic Einzbern castle.

"What are you looking at, Saber?"

As Irisviel called her from behind, the young woman at the window — Saber turned around.

"... Kiritsugu and your daughter are playing in the forest, outside."

Doubtful, perplexed, frowning a little with a stiff expression, her beautiful look isn't impaired. More than the humor floating on a smile, the slack less serenity of her strained look suited her: she is that sort of rare beauty.

Can you believe that her young and vivacious presence is that of a materialized Heroic Spirit? But she definitely is 'Saber'... She was one of the seven Heroic Spirits invited by the Grail, with the class of the strongest sword, a full-fledged Servant.

At her side, Irisviel looked through the window. That was the moment Kiritsugu rushed into the forest carrying Ilyasviel on his back.

"You are surprised to see Kiritsugu like that, aren't you?"

Saber nodded honestly to the smiling Irisviel.

From her position, after all, she couldn't see the girl's face, and barely saw the silver hair inherited from her mother; but the shrilling voice she heard just before they left her field of vision was, certainly, overflowing with joy. Just that was enough to guess the harmony between the frolicking father and daughter.

"To be honest, I was under the impression that my Master was a more coldhearted person."

At Saber's words, Irisviel gave an embarrassed smile.

"Well, this isn't without reason."

Since her summoning, Saber hadn't received a word from her Master Kiritsugu.

In the end, Servants are only a tool to serve the Masters, and that was definitely how a magus would treat them. Nevertheless, Kiritsugu's attitude toward Saber was too much. Not even speaking to her, ignoring her questions, barely looking at her, Kiritsugu kept pushing away the Heroic Spirit he had summoned himself.

Although she wouldn't show any of it, Saber was definitely highly dissatisfied with the attitude of that man. Obviously, the Kiritsugu she had been attached to was far different from the man playing with his daughter outside the castle.

"If this is Kiritsugu's true face, then I must have fallen in great disgrace with my Master..."

As Saber muttered, Irisviel unintentionally chuckled: her pained face showed her true motives that were normally hidden on a handsome profile. Saber was even more unsettled.

"This isn't so funny, Irisviel."

"... I'm sorry. I was wondering if you were still holding a grudge from when you were summoned."

"A little. ... I understand that my appearance is different from what anyone would expect. But that shouldn't be something that would surprise the both of you so much."

Despite her gallant dignity, Saber truly looked like a girl not even past her teens. When she appeared in the glowing summoning circle, both Kiritsugu and Irisviel had been struck speechless.

That was to be expected. The Heroic Spirit Kiritsugu was summoning had been recorded in history as a man.

The owner of the golden scabbard from Cornwall, that is, the one known as the sole bearer of the holy sword Excalibur; nobody could have guessed the true identity of the Heroic Spirit Arthur Pendragon was a young girl.

"Certainly, I have acted as a man, and have wished that that lie was carried over through history... But it is discomforting that one would doubt I am the owner of this scabbard."

"You may say this, but that's inevitable. Your legend is very well known, and it has been dramatized for 1500 years. That's quite a gap with the image we had of the King Arthur."

As Irisviel smiles uncomfortably, Saber gives a dissatisfied sigh.

"Of course, you would wonder about my appearance, somehow. The instant I drew the sword of contract from the stone, I stopped aging through its magic, keeping my apparent youth. My people didn't even question my appearance at that time to begin with, as I was king. The only thing I was asked to do is fulfil my duty as a king."

How harsh a youth had that been?

The kingdom of Britain exposed by the invasion of pagans, thrown on the verge of destruction. Following the predictions of a magus, the young king, "incarnation of a dragon", was burdened with the duty of the savior, invincible through ten, twelve years of battling.

In spite of these feats, this was the ill-fated ruler whose throne was finally taken over by his own blood, betrayed, never forgiven for ending their glory.

The truth that such a delicate girl was burdened with a so violent, painful fate, weighed on Irisviel's heart.

"Does Kiritsugu... Hate me for my womanhood? Because I am not worthy of a sword?"

Saber muttered in a dry voice, watching Kiritsugu disappear into the forest afar, touching Irisviel's feelings.

"That's wrong. He understands your power. That man isn't so stupid as to misjudge a Heroic Spirit who was placed into the Saber class. ... There must be another reason, if he got angry."

"To get angry?"

Saber reacted to what she heard.

"Do you mean I made Kiritsugu angry? I cannot understand that. I still haven't spoken to him even once."

"Then it could be something unrelated to you. What he is angry at must be the legend of the King Arthur that was transmitted to us."

If the Heroic Spirit Kiritsugu summoned had been the "grown man" King Arthur that the legend told of, then he probably wouldn't have rejected his Servant so much. Simply, for him who kept his feelings from mixing up, discussions were best kept at the required minimum. Then, in the end, his daring "disregard" was the direct result of a highly emotional response.

The one who pulled the sword stuck in the stone was a young girl; that truth Kiritsugu had just learned was the source of his open indignation at the legend of the King Arthur.

"He must be angry at the people who surrounded you in your era. At the cruelty of those who forced the duty of a king on a small girl."

"That wasn't the case. I was prepared ever since I pulled the sword from the stone."

Saber said so without reserve, her expression still cool and clear. Troubled, Irisviel gave a short nod.

"... The fact that you accepted that fate like that is all the more provoking. Perhaps it is on that point he is angry at you, the girl named Artoria."

"..."

Saber briefly lowered her eyes, unable to answer. But when she immediately looked up again, her eyes were still and obstinate.

"This is being too emotional. There was nobody who would complain to those who made the decision, in my era."

"And that's why he remains silent."

With Irisviel's fast answer, Saber can only falter this time.

"Emiya Kiritsugu and the Heroic Spirit Artoria are definitely incompatible—that's what I will leave it at. If we are to talk, we will only deny each other."

Irisviel could but agree on that. If Kiritsugu was to spend time with this proud Heroic Spirit, he would always feel like their minds are too different from each other's.

Irisviel could understand each other's complaint and had as much compassion for each of them. So, the fact that these two would never agree was, again, Irisviel's resigned conclusion.

"... I thank you, Irisviel. Without a woman like you, I might have lost this Grail War without even fighting."

"The same to you. I want my husband to be the one to reach the Grail."

Fearing the incompatibility with the Heroic Spirit Artoria, Kiritsugu had come up with an unthinkable solution to this deadlock.

Servant and Master will act completely apart.

To begin with, there is no range limit for the contract between the two. Whatever the distance, a Command Spell can control the Servant, and prana can still be supplied as well unless the Master faints. But Master and Servant actually staying together is solely a mutual understanding. Prudence dictates that battle decisions aren't just left to the Servant. The Master needs to remain on the battle scene to control the Servant.

If Kiritsugu moves independently without knowing about Saber's actions, of course that doesn't mean he trusts her completely. Kiritsugu entrusts to Irisviel the duty of being his agent to oversee Saber’s actions.

That's not something so reckless at all. For example, if Kiritsugu's Servant were to act rebellious, there is no fear she would want to kill Irisviel as long as she wants the Grail. Without Irisviel, then even if Saber defeats all the other Servants, she won't be able to reach the Grail. The "vessel of the Grail" that Irisviel carries is absolutely necessary for the Grail of Fuyuki to materialize. Therefore, Saber will need to defend Irisviel from the other Masters.

That irregular team formation was solely due to Kiritsugu and Saber's respective battle tactics. The Heroic Spirit of the knight of Saber is a fighter that has Servant abilities and Noble Phantasm properties fully geared toward a "full frontal battle". Her mindset would never consent to any

makeshift that doesn't fit with that. On the other hand, her Master Emiya Kiritsugu is essentially a hitman who plans out clever schemes, and there is no possibility for the two of them to arrange for anything more than average.

Rather, as far as affinities go, Kiritsugu evaluated that Irisviel would fit much better as Saber's partner. His wife is definitely a homunculus outcast, but she still is of the noble Einzbern family, and as such, she has a natural elegance and dignity. Irisviel definitely is the kind of lady a knight would devote his loyalty to.

In fact, past a few days of living together after the summoning, Irisviel and Saber have both developed a mutual understanding and respect. The natural air of nobility Irisviel held was similar to that of a "princess" of Saber's own era, and Saber's nobility was a perfect match with Irisviel's well breeding.

Therefore, the contractual Master Kiritsugu proposed that his wife Irisviel acted as a "substitute Master" in his stead, which Saber easily accepted. Her problem really was that she felt uneasiness in cooperating with Kiritsugu, and more than letting her swing her sword freely, Irisviel was indeed more appropriate; that much was agreed on. So, the two of them were under a master and servant relationship in accordance to the oath of a knight, different from the Servant contract; and this is how they are now preparing for the Heaven's Feel.

"Irisviel, what kind of person do you view Kiritsugu as?"

"A guide as well as a husband. The one who gave a meaning to my life. — But that's not what you want to know about, is it?"

Saber nodded. What she wanted to know isn't about Irisviel's subjectivity, but about the side of Emiya Kiritsugu Saber doesn't know.

"To say the truth, he is a kind person. Only, because he was too nice, he couldn't forgive the cruelty of the world. He chose to be even more coldhearted to fight against that."

"I can understand such a determination. With a standpoint any lower, one would have to throw away his human sensitivity."

Saying this, you can't think that Kiritsugu and Saber are any alike. Perhaps Kiritsugu's disgust toward the Heroic Spirit of the king Arthur was of the same kind.

"To save the world with the power of the Grail— is that what you are saying? What your and Kiritsugu's wish is?"

"Yes. Mine is only a reflection of his wish, though. But I do think it is something worth risking your life for."

At Irisviel's words, Saber nodded, her eyes set ablaze as well.

"The wish I have for the Grail is also similar. I want to help the Britain I couldn't save by myself. I think what you and Kiritsugu want is right. It is a path to be proud of."

"Right..."

Smiling, Irisviel replied ambiguously.

Pride— that precisely is the problem.

Her husband's words came back in Irisviel's mind. The true reason why Kiritsugu and Saber behave so differently.

'The two of you will be flowers on the battleground. Never running away or hiding, shine so that nobody will look away from the Servant Saber.

Because those who will look at Saber will be turning their backs to me.'

Kiritsugu has no intention of leaving the battle to Irisviel and Saber. Rather, he intends to actively transform the progress of the war by his own means. He will be an assassin sneaking up from behind the enemy, and Saber has the role of the lure that will make his trap certain; no more than a feint.

Irisviel couldn't say anything, but it was clear what methods Kiritsugu would adopt once the war starts. What will the proud and honest knight think after that... thinking of it, Irisviel is worried about it.

"Irisviel, you have a deep understanding of your husband Kiritsugu, and have much faith in him."

Unaware of Irisviel's melancholy, Saber watched the harmony between the father and daughter through the window.

"Looking at it that way, the two of you appear to be a pretty normal couple looking for happiness.

But if Kiritsugu thinks that I too should have looked for happiness as a person and not as a king the same way... Both are the same wish one can't help having."

"... So, you don't have a grudge against him anymore?"

"Of course, I don't."

With a delicate face, Saber nodded, and Irisviel felt like she was betraying the Servant.

"But— Irisviel, is it alright? To tell me about something like that."

"Eh?"

Asking again, Saber's eyes seemed to want to tell more.

"I mean— you will need to accept leaving your daughter, like Kiritsugu. Tomorrow... Won't we fly over to Japan for the Grail?"

"Ah, that. —It's fine. There is no need for me and my child to part."

Irisviel smiled peacefully to show gratitude toward Saber’s anxiety; but somehow, the lonely hollowness of that smile troubled her.

"If I am to cease to exist as Irisviel, it doesn't mean I will disappear. When she grows up, I am sure she will understand. Because she is an Einzbern woman like me."

"..."

She couldn't grasp the enigmatic words of Irisviel, but Saber's face stiffened at the sinister omen she could feel hidden inside them.

"Irisviel, you will definitely survive. I will protect you until the end. I swear it on the pride of my sword."

The knight's solemn statement made Irisviel smile brightly.

"Saber, get the Grail. For yourself, and for your Master. Then the Einzberns will reach their 1000-year desire, and me and my daughter will be freed from our destiny. —We rely only on you, Artoria."

Again, Saber couldn't comprehend the meaning of Irisviel's anxious smile. Her hair glittering like snow, and her radiant beauty, that woman filled with

a warm kindness, just what fate was she born tied to? —For the knight to know the complete truth is a revelation that has yet to come.

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The fair hunt for winter buds of wingnuts ended with Ilyasviel's victory, ending a series of 3 consecutive defeats for the champion. Also, no field nut trees were found in the Einzbern forest.

After the battle, the two casually walk back. Because they walked deep into the forest, the majesty of the Einzbern castle has become a silhouette in the haze.

"The next time will be when you come back from Japan, Kiritsugu."

Having fulfilled her revenge, Ilyasviel looks up with a large smile at her father. Unable to look straight at her, Kiritsugu feigned serenity as best as he could.

"Yes... Next time, daddy won't lose."

"Uhuhu, if you don't do better, we will soon be a hundred points apart, you know?"

The smile of his beloved daughter was becoming too much of a burden for the man.

Just how should he tell her? Until the end, maybe that will be the one thing he will think of.

This is the worst struggle for Kiritsugu. But, by all means, he must win. For that purpose, he can't afford to give up his life.

So— the promise to his daughter to play again in the winter forest is only a small victory.

Save everything. Abandon everything for that.

To the man who swore to do that, love could only be a thorn.

Whenever he loved someone, it was a curse to have to be ready to keep it hidden in his heart.

This was the fate that burdened Emiya Kiritsugu in exchange for his ideal. Love was a torture that could not be healed.

Then why—he was questioning himself when he looks at the frozen white sky and earth.

Why did he love so much the one woman and the child he shares his blood with?

"Kiritsugu, how long will your work with mother last? When will you be back?"

Unaware of her father’s suffering, Ilyasviel asked with a lively voice.

"Daddy will come back in a couple of weeks, probably. —For mom, that should be, much longer, I think..."

"Yeah. Mother told Ilya. That we will part forever."

Hearing her reply without a shadow on her face was the finishing blow for Kiritsugu. His knees lost the strength to push through the snow-covered path.

His wife was ready. His daughter was prepared.

For the truth was that Emiya Kiritsugu was snatching her mother away from this young girl.

"Mother told me that even if we wouldn't see each other anymore, she will always be by my side. I don't have to be sad, she has been telling me, before going to bed. So, Ilya will always be with mother."

"... I see..."

At that point, Kiritsugu became aware of the blood dyeing his hands crimson red.

He didn't know how many people he had killed; how impure his arms were. For you to hold a child as a father, that is definitely unforgivable— he told himself.

But wasn't that warning the same as running away?

This child will never be embraced by her mother ever again already. And if her father Kiritsugu abandons that duty as well... Who will be holding Ilyasviel again?

"—Hey, Ilya."

Kiritsugu stopped his daughter walking beside him, dropped down and wrapped his arms around the girl.

"... Kiritsugu?"

In 8 years, every time he held that small body in his arms, Kiritsugu doubted his fatherhood, deep inside. Disgusted by his acting as a father, he could only scorn at himself for being unable to do otherwise.

But this too is reaching an end. As this child's only father, he must hold her in the warmth of his arms. Without running away, without lying.

"Will you wait for me, Ilya? Can you stand to be alone until daddy comes back?"

"Yes! I will bear it. I'll wait for you with mother, Kiritsugu."

Memories of this day will probably fill Ilyasviel with joy until the end. Her cheerful voice holds no grief.

"... Then daddy will promise you something too. I won't make you wait. Daddy will definitely come back quickly."

Emiya Kiritsugu took on another heavy burden.

Enduring the thorn that is love that pierced his whole body, he tightly embraced his child for an eternity.

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Uryū Ryūnosuke disliked splatter movies. He did understand the necessity for that kind of amusement in itself, though.

Not just horror, but war movies, panic movies, and all the way to adventure movies and dramas; why does fiction keep painting man's death tirelessly?

That may be, because the spectators can minimize their fear of death by observing a fictitious imitation of "death".

Humans find pride in "wisdom" and dread in "ignorance". Hence if they can "experience" and "comprehend" a given fear, then it is a victory that resembles the overcoming of that fear.

However, "death" is merely... something that you can't experience while you live. Therefore, it is impossible to understand its true meaning. That's why humans can only guess the essence of death by observing other people's death and make up a virtual experience.

Indeed, for the civilized society to respect human life, this virtual experience cannot but rely on fiction. Yet, where war makes your neighbor minced meat with bombing and land mines, nobody watches horror movies.

Similarly, it is important to be entertained by fictional physical pain, mental stress or any kind of sorrow. When experiencing bodily sensations by yourself becomes too risky, you can overcome and remove uneasiness by observing those who do taste those sensations. —That's why a silver screen or a cathode-ray tube bring tears of screams, grief and anguish.

That is good. That's understandable. Once, Ryūnosuke feared "death" like any ordinary person. He could have been an amateur of horror movies, if death could have been minimized and fear conquered by looking at the special make-ups of slaughtered bodies, the red ink of blood splashes and the realist acting reproducing a screaming "stale death".

Depiction of cruelty in fiction has a bad influence on young people, that much can be said; but to Uryū Ryūnosuke, this is highly ridiculous nonsense. Because if blood and screams in splatter horror had been at least a little more realistic, he wouldn't have become a homicidal maniac.

This is, really, nothing but the result of an earnest curiosity. Ryūnosuke just had to know what "death" was. The vivid red of the hemorrhagic artery, the touch and the warmth of what was inside the abdominal cavity. The agony of the victim getting these pulled out until death, the musical tone of the screams. There really was nothing that could beat that.

People say murder is a crime. But let's think about it. Aren't there 5 billion of humans crowding on this Earth? Ryūnosuke knows well how outrageous a number that is. Because he counted the gravels in the park when he was a kid. Of course, he got discouraged after ten thousand, but he didn't forget the frustration he felt that time. There are five hundred thousand times that many humans. Furthermore, it is said that the number of births and deaths everyday can be counted by the tens of thousands. What weight can Ryūnosuke have by becoming a murderer? Besides, by killing people one by one, Ryūnosuke can perfect each of their death thoroughly. Occasionally, he enjoys making sure the "process of death" takes up to half a day. With this

incentive and experience, the information volume brought by one death can be much more important compared to what you can get by living a too short life. From Uryū Ryūnosuke's reasoning, can't you say that homicide is a more productive action?

With that creed, Ryūnosuke wandered around in various places, accumulating murders. He didn't fear the law. The feeling of being imprisoned and handcuffed —however many men it would actually require for that— was something he definitely "understood" to the point of not fearing it; he had "observed" enough deaths by hanging or on the electric chair for that. But his reason for escaping the law was, simply, because there is nothing to gain from being taken away from freedom and life in prison; hence he considered that living a life seeking everyday pleasure was better, that it was the right choice for a healthy man.

He is satisfied by squeezing the best out of the life force of those he kills, of feelings such as the attachment for human life, anger and affection. To let his victims, know the exact time and circumstances of their death, that in itself had a deep meaning as rich as a miniaturized life.

When on the verge of death, very common people will behave strangely, and on the other hand, people seen as exceptional will die in an extremely banal way— observing such patterns in humans, Ryūnosuke pursued death; and while being an expert in death, he greatly studied its complete opposite, life. The more he killed people, the more he understood the lives he took.

That knowledge, that discernment in itself was a kind of dignity, a style.

Although Ryūnosuke couldn't find the words to accurately explain why he had that power— if he really had to sum it up, it would be all with the expression "be cool".

To make a comparison, it's like sprinkles in a bar or crags spraying around. Unable to get used to such a playground, loosening without knowing one's place, and not understanding one's amusement. But if it is about accumulating experience and adopting a rule of conduct, then he is a welcome regular customer in a place where he can control the mood into intimacy. That's what it is to be cool as a way of life.

So, to speak, Ryūnosuke was a genuine player when it comes to be familiar with the comfort of the stool that is human life. Like that, he could look for victims savoring a cocktail of new methods, appreciating the taste of satisfaction.

This isn't some sort of metaphor; in the town, at night, Ryūnosuke's pleasure was his excellency in attracting victims like light traps for insects,

with a certain interest in the opposite sex. Moreover, women were, certainly, charmed by the composure and dignity that emerged from his enigmatic posture. After seduction, he would always enjoy some alcohol, and the girls he really got into always ended as a blood-stained piece of meat.

The town at night would always be Ryūnosuke's hunting ground, and the prey would never notice the menace that is Ryūnosuke.

Once, he saw a leopard in some animal program, and was enchanted by its elegance. He felt a connection with the brilliant modus operandi of the hunt. The leopard was the beast with a cool way of life that became his model, literally.

Since then, Ryūnosuke ended up being self-conscious of his image of a leopard. He was always wearing clothes with something from a leopard. Jacket or pants, shoes or hat, or if that was too showy, he even had socks or underwear, handkerchief or gloves. He had an amber-colored cat's-eye ring, always in his pocket even when he couldn't slip it on his middle finger, and he would always carry on himself a pendant made with a real fang.

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So, this murderer named Uryū Ryūnosuke has just recently started feeling down with a serious loss of motivation.

After some 30 victims, his methods for execution and torture has started losing its freshness as they all look the same. Testing all the techniques he can come up with, even when Ryūnosuke witnesses their dying agony, teasing his praise has already lost the taste of excitement and stimulation.

Deciding to return to the place of his origin, Ryūnosuke came home after some 5 years, breaking into the backyard storehouse as his parents had fallen asleep in this late night. It was in this storehouse that he had taken his first victim, and it was now crumbling, abandoned.

Meeting again after 5 years, his sister's body had completely changed, but she waited for her brother at the place Ryūnosuke had hidden it. The silent meeting with his sister gave him no particularly strong emotion, and Ryūnosuke was disappointed that he had come for nothing; but at that

moment, he found a rotten old book from the mountain of junk crammed in the warehouse.

The thin worm-eaten book was not a printed copy but an individual note. The postscript says ninth year of the Keiō era. This writing is more than a hundred-year-old, dating back to the end of the Bakumatsu.

Having occasionally tapped into Chinese books during his student days, Ryūnosuke could actually read the notes without much difficulty. But the problem was the content itself. The incoherent writing of thin characters was preposterous nonsense about some kind of dark magic. Moreover, the inscriptions involved Christianity and Satan; apparently it was about some western occults. Offering human sacrifices to otherworldly demons to invoke spirits; that was definitely fiction.

In the dying hours of the era of Edo, studying western knowledge was a genre of heresy. While a book about the occult, the most heretic of heresy, could only be a prank, Ryūnosuke had some admiration for it, and he cared little about its authenticity. It was already quite cool and funky to keep just the old book on the occult from the storehouse. That was enough of a stimulus to renew his inspiration as a homicidal maniac.

At once, Ryūnosuke made the place a "spiritual ground" as described in the notes, then resumed his nighttime reading. He didn't know just what meaning the land now called the town of Fuyuki had, but Ryūnosuke was setting up the important points of the mood for new killings; he followed the instructions of the old book as faithfully as possible.

When he first sacrificed a girl, who had run off to play at night in an abandoned factory, the stimulus was more interesting than expected. The style of the sacrificial ritual totally captivated Ryūnosuke despite his inexperience. He became infatuated with the method, and after three failed attempts, the peaceful provincial city was struck with fear.

Like that, Uryū Ryūnosuke broke into the house of a four-person family for the fourth crime; he was by then completely intoxicated with ecstasy in the midst of the crime, and of course he started cooling off after repeating the same crime for the fourth time. The voice of reason in his head started whispering in his ears.

Ryūnosuke had accumulated crimes as he wandered all over the country. He never killed twice on the same spot, and always disposed scrupulously of the body. Most of Ryūnosuke's victims are, even now, being searched as missing persons.

But this time, a series of crimes without hiding the remains would warn people quickly; this definitely was folly. Obsessed with the method, he had completely forgotten about his usual prudence. This one was particularly bad. For the three previous ones, he had tried to draw the magic circle with blood, and mistakes made him go short on blood. So, this time, to draw a perfect circle, he had decided to kill a little more than usual; but really, slaughtering a whole sleeping family might be a little too sensational. The police will be in a frenzy and everyone in the region will be increasingly wary. Going into hiding is definitely not the style of a ‘leopard’.

Ryūnosuke finally decided — for the time being, let's leave the city of Fuyuki quiet. He will stick with the black mass as he quite liked the result, but he would have to reduce the number from 3 to 1 at a time for safety purpose.

After sorting up his feelings, a renewed Ryūnosuke decided to concentrate on the ritual again.

"♪ Fill, fill, filling, fill. With each repetition, four times— eh, five times? Err, only when it's full, break it up... Is it? Yeah."

Reciting the summoning chant, Ryūnosuke drew on the wooden floor of the living room with his bloody brush. The ceremony really is some serious business; that ambiance isn't Ryūnosuke's style at all. The serious mood was for his personal satisfaction; after all, what's important is the feeling.

Having practiced the magic circle all night, he finished it in one go. There was no need for reserves anymore, then. Even though he had killed the parents and the eldest daughter to draw their blood.

"♪ Fill, fill, filling, filling, fill, there. That's five times alright. Okay?"

The leftover blood seemed suitable for some fine art on the walls of the room. Waiting for a reaction, he turned toward the last survivor rolled up in the corner— a grade schoolboy gagged with a rope. The young kid was crying, his eyes swollen, looking at his torn-up sister and parents.

"Say— boy, do you believe in demons?"

Asking the shivering kid, Ryūnosuke tilted his head in a dramatic act. Obviously, he wasn't expecting a reply: with his mouth gagged, all the kid could do was tremble in fear.

"You know, newspapers and magazines keep calling me a demon. But ain't it weird? A single stick of dynamite would do more victims at once than me."

Kids are nice. Ryūnosuke liked kids. Frightened adults cry and scream, so on that part, kids really are better. You can just laugh it off when they get incontinent.

"Nah, it’s fine. I'm kind of a demon. But if there were real demons beside me, I'd like to try to talk a little with them. Now that'd be nice. " Sup, name's Uryū Ryūnosuke, I'm a demon!" how does that sound for an introduction? That should be a good opportunity to make sure of it. If real demons exist or not..."

His good humor improving, Ryūnosuke tested his charm on the trembling kid. Normally, talking was annoying, but looking at blood— and standing in front of someone on the verge of death, he seemed to change and started getting loquacious.

The blood of 3 people was enough, and that was his only reason for letting the youngest child live. Though he did think he'd take the time to enjoy killing him later, after the completion of the ceremony—

"Anyway. If by any chance, a demon really comes out, wouldn't it be stupid to not have anything to drink and chat? So, boy... If Mr. Demon here does pay me a visit, how about a little killing?"

"...!"

The young kid could understand well enough Ryūnosuke's idea. Ryūnosuke beamed when the kid, his eyes wide open, started twisting and struggling around without a scream.

"I wonder how it is to be killed by a demon? Will it go zip or splash, that gotta be some fun to watch. Not something you see every day— ah ouch!"

The unexpected sting was like a cold shower on Ryūnosuke's frenzy.

That was the back of his right hand. He felt an intense pain as if he had bathed his hand in a powerful poison. As soon as the pain started, the swelling calmed down and stuck on the surface of his skin.

"... What the, hell? This..."

Somehow, a pattern like a tattoo was there on his pained right hand, and he had no idea why.

"… Eh."

Rather than feeling anxious, Ryūnosuke reacted dandily. That incomprehensible pattern of three intertwined snakes resembled some tribal tattoo, which didn’t look half bad.

But his foppishness lasted only a moment; Ryūnosuke turned around in surprise when he felt the air move behind him.

The air grows hot. A current that shouldn't be possible indoors. Soon, the breeze changed into a whirlwind blowing in the living room.

Ryūnosuke stared at the magic circle drawn on the floor with fresh blood as it unbelievably started emitting a phosphorescent light.

He did expect some sort of abnormality to occur, but— such a blatant phenomenon was beyond his anticipation. Something big, just like in the horror movies Ryūnosuke despised. These childish effects were so laughable it wasn't funny, but it was definitely real.

The violent gust was now trampling the room, blowing off the TV, the flower vase and other furniture. In the center of the magic circle, a mist started rising, and sparks scatter. The scene was otherworldly, but Uryū Ryūnosuke was definitely not scared. He was his child staring at a magic trick, his chest dancing from expectation.

Fascination for the unknown—

The enchantment once discovered in the marvel called "death". The radiance that disappeared unnoticed when he grew tired of accumulating murder, right now—

A flash. Then a roaring sound like a thunderbolt.

The impact ran past Ryūnosuke's body. The feeling was like being fried by a high-tension current.

The strange power once passed through the Uryū family. Now forgotten by its descendants, but still carried through their blood uninterrupted, the 'Magic Circuits' had been sleeping until this day inside Ryūnosuke; that inherited mystery was now unleashed like a tidal wave. And that "alien power" flowing in Ryūnosuke has just now started running in him, then streaming back outside to the thing invited from the underworld.

—So, to speak, this was an exception amongst exceptions.

To begin with, the Grail of Fuyuki itself requires seven Servants. It isn't the capable ones who summon Servants and try to become Masters. The Grail will pick appropriate persons until the count reaches seven.

The summoning of a Servant is also fundamental for the Grail. The hard work magi put into the ritual is only a precaution to create a bond with a perfect, reliable Servant. Even with an unskilled summoning circle and without chanting the spell, if a human has a catalyst, the requirements for the Grail can be met...

"—I ask of you"

From inside the enveloping haze, a soft yet strangely carrying voice called out.

The wind had stopped unnoticed. The light had left the magic circle, the radiance was disappearing, and the circle drawn on the floor with fresh blood was blackened as if burned up. And from inside the fading mist, the owner of the voice earlier suddenly showed his figure to Ryūnosuke.

A young face without a single crease yet. A pair of large, hulling eyes and greasy cheeks. Along with the deathly pallor of his face, he reminded Ryūnosuke of a painting from Munch.

His garments too were quite odd. His figure, tall enough to reach the clouds, was wrapped in a much-folded robe, decorated with luxurious latches made of precious metals; his whole style looks exactly like some "evil magician" from a manga.

"You who called me, you who requested for me, summoning the spirit of the Caster class... I ask for your name. Who are you?"

"..."

Ryūnosuke gave a small response. The one who had come out of the summoning circle with great flashes and smokes— was an ordinary human. That was definitely not what he had expected. No exaggerated monster, just a perfectly normal human? Ryūnosuke was puzzled. His clothes were definitely queer, but did that mean this man was a real demon?

Scratching his head for a moment, Ryūnosuke took his decision.

"Uh, name's Uryū Ryūnosuke. I'm a freelancer. My hobby is murder in general. I like kids and young women. Recently I'm back to sharpening my basis again."

The man in robe nodded. Apparently, he had ignored everything beside the name.

"Very well. The contract is complete. Your desire for the Holy Grail is my desire as well. We shall make the cauldron of heaven ours."

"Holy— Grail?"

On the moment, Ryūnosuke didn't get what it was about. Right, thinking again, didn't the old book found in the storehouse mention something like that? And he had skipped it because the passage was dull.

"... Yeah well, let's save the troublesome talk for later."

Ryūnosuke waved his hand lightly, before pointing with his chin at the kid rolled up in the corner.

"For now, let's talk over a drink. Won't you eat that?"

The other man, with a face as expressionless as a mask, gauged the tied kid and Ryūnosuke. Feeling anxious, Ryūnosuke couldn't tell by the silence if his words and intentions had hit home. Maybe that was asking for too much. After all, who decided that demons eat children?

Silently, the man picked a book from a pocket of his robe. The bulky book appeared to be an antique treasure from an ancient era. No doubt it was some gadget of the demon.

Ryūnosuke noticed in one glance what hide the cover was made of.

"Ah, cool! That's human skin, right?"

Ryūnosuke can recognize it because he once tried to put up a lamp shade with human skin pelt off a victim. Eventually, he got discouraged at his poor handicraft midway, but he can't help but respect an elder who has achieved a similar work through the end.

The man, casting only a glance at Ryūnosuke, ignored his compliment and gently opened the book, his hand rapidly flipping through the pages; he then muttered one or two words that made no sense, and as if it was enough, closed the book before putting it back in his pocket.

"... ?"

Leaving the helpless Ryūnosuke, the man walked toward the boy rolled up on the floor. At the strange events that had kept happening, the boy winced harder as if death was inevitable, trying to crawl away from the man.

Looking at the child in such a state, the man seemed suddenly full of compassion and kindness, which startled Ryūnosuke. What does that mean?

"— You have nothing to be afraid of, my boy."

Unlike what his odd appearance suggested, the strange man gently spoke to the boy. The imprisoned kid gradually notices his warmth and looks at the man questioningly.

As a reply, the man gives a smiling nod, bending toward the boy and extending his hand at him— gently untying his ropes and gag.

"Can you stand?"

As an encouragement, the man patted the boy on the back, helping him up.

Of course, Ryūnosuke had no doubt the man was a devil, but he was really dissatisfied with how he was treating the child. Is he actually going to let him live?

Anyway, no matter how you looked at him, the man is queer. When silent, his features would look dreadful like the face of a corpse, but when smiling without any apparent maliciousness, he would seem as pure as a saint.

"Now, my boy, the door over there will lead you out of this room. Don't look around, walk straight forward by yourself. Can you do that by yourself?"

"... Yes..."

At the boy's brave nod, the man responded with a bright smile, softly pushing his back.

The boy started running lightly across the bloodstained living room, as he avoided looking at the corpses of both his parents and his sister as instructed.

"Hum, hey..."

Of course, Ryūnosuke couldn't ignore it all and spoke, but the man quickly interrupted him with a hand sign. Overpowered, Ryūnosuke helplessly watched the kid escape.

The boy opened the door and stepped into the corridor. In front of him was the entranceway. His eyes drowned in fear until then were now shinning again in hope and relief.

The climax came the next instant.

The boy was leaving the stairs behind him, facing the entranceway. From the second floor, invisible from the living room, something suddenly fell down in an avalanche on the young boy. A bundle of heavy ropes — no, a flock of countless snakes — an indescribable life form, or rather, a living creature twined around the boy's whole body, and with an otherworldly force, took away the young body up to the second floor.

Then— a soul-rending scream. The clicking tongues of an infinite number of creatures, and the echo of small bones crushed. The rashness of whatever was happening on the upper floor easily stimulated imagination even without witnessing it.

The strange man closed his eyes and raised his face, listening to the nightmarish sound, drunk it in attentively. His hand shivered. Apparently, he was deeply moved.

But the emotion was just as great for Ryūnosuke... No, as he didn't expect something like that to happen; the catharsis was far more intense for him.

"There is a certain freshness in fear."

The lingering memory of the horror he had himself planned out hadn't drawn out yet —there now was no remaining doubt he was a devil— when he started speaking, and his voice sounded like he was entranced in a dream.

"Fright is about the feeling that you will die. The true meaning of terror doesn't lie in a static condition, but in a change— this is the instant when hope is turned into despair.

How was it? The smell of fresh fear and death."

"— Kh —"

Ryūnosuke was at loss of words.

The 'thing' that was feasting on the kid's remains upstairs was, apparently, the man's doing. He was the one who had appeared from the bloody magic circle, after all. There was no possible doubt something had happened when he had opened his book with the binding made out of human skin.

The method was nerve-racking, but that is what is splendid in this philosophy. Ryūnosuke was no match for the creativity and perfect aesthetics of such evilness. Him who held such a vivid and moving "aesthetics of death" deserved the greatest praises.

"Cool! That's wicked! Man, that was super cool!"

Feeling like dancing with joy, Ryūnosuke grabbed the man's hand and shook it. Making friends with this strange man was no less moving than meeting a celebrity. The mass murderer Uryū Ryūnosuke finally felt adoration and respect from the depth of his heart for someone in this boring world.

"Okay! I don't know about this Grail thing, but I'll follow you! I'll help you in whatever you want. We'll kill more. There are plenty of sacrifices. Show me more of your cool killings!"

"You are a pleasant fellow."

Understanding of Ryūnosuke's emotion, the man replied gently to his violent handshake with a pure smile.

"Ryūnosuke, was it? It is a good omen I got a Master as understanding as you. This is developing more and more into an ideal situation for my aspirations."

When a summoning is made without a catalyst, the Heroic Spirit will be one that has a similar mindset as the Master. The one summoned by the vicious murderer was one who had left his name on extremely cruel acts; he was a Heroic Spirit with a taste for true tyranny. Or rather, based on that nature, it would be more suitable to call him a vengeful spirit instead of a heroic spirit.

"Ah—, right, I didn't get to hear your name."

Remembering about the important parts, Ryūnosuke started acting more familiarly.

"My name, yes. Indeed. For this era, you could call me..."

The man put a finger to his lips, then after thinking a little,

"... Then, for now, you can call me "Bluebeard". Pleased to meet you."

He replied familiarly with an angelic smile.

Thus, for the last position of the fourth Heaven's Feel — the Master and his Servant 'Caster' completed the contract. This is how, without knowing the meaning of the Grail War or his nature as a magus, the casual murderer received Command Seals and a Servant.

For a trick of fate, this may be the foulest play.

-172:38:15

The saying goes that the hour when even trees sleep doesn't apply to magi and Servants.

The Heroic Spirit of the shadows, Assassin, has a better grasp than anyone on the complexity of being prepared in the darkness of the night.

Especially since the magi gathered in the city of Fuyuki have a double interest. Standing on the hill of Miyama town, neither of the western-styled houses of Matō and Tōsaka were left behind in term of splendor.

Masters aiming for the Grail, the two landlords were using, lately, some low-grade familiars to patrol left and right, day and night around their visible castles. Naturally, the master of the mansion must be ready, and stretched around a multitude of bounded fields for detection and defense even inside the mansion; it must be a stronghold in the magecraft sense of the term.

Stepping unauthorized into the bounded fields is all but safe, all the more for the large mass of prana that is a Servant. Essentially, even if it is a spiritual body, it should be just about impossible to slip through the bounded fields of the fortress undetected.

However, the impossible can always be made possible. That is the Presence Concealment skill of the Assassin class. While he does not excel in battle power, Assassin can suppress his prana emission until it reaches zero to creep in the shadows and reach his target.

Additionally, for the Assassin of this time, Kotomine Kirei's Servant, this night's infiltration operation was especially easy. The garden he was now sneaking in isn't the one in the Matō mansion that has been considered enemy territory for some time. It is the mansion of Tōsaka Tokiomi, who was his Master Kirei's ally until just yesterday. Of course, Assassin too has

agreed with Kirei and Tokiomi to deceive the other master’s and remain undercover. Obeying that secret agreement, he has undertaken the guarding of the Tōsaka mansion on countless occasions. Knowing all about the disposition of the bounded fields, he was naturally aware of the blind spot.

In his spiritual form, Assassin progressed through the many alarm fields without a problem, laughing at the ironic fate of Tōsaka Tokiomi. That arrogant magus has placed a considerable faith in his protégé Kirei but can't imagine that he might be bitten by his dog.

Kirei's order to murder Tokiomi had reached Assassin no longer than an hour ago. He was unsure of what caused Kirei to change his mind, but Tokiomi's summoning of a Servant a few days ago must be when it began. Tokiomi seems to have summoned the Servant Archer, but apparently, that Heroic Spirit must be weaker than Kirei expected. And as the merit of the cooperation with Tokiomi faded away, he agreed with the decision Kirei made this night.

"Vain prudence is unnecessary. Have no fear of facing Archer. You need to obliterate Tōsaka Tokiomi quickly."

That was the order of his Master Kirei. Against the despised, weakest fighter Assassin, he won't be afraid and won't hurry— it should be easy to betray the miscalculations of the Heroic Spirit Archer summoned by Tōsaka Tokiomi.

Halfway through the garden, the blind spot of the bounded field one could just pass through vanished. From there on, the barrier has to be destroyed by physical mean, and one need to progress while removing it. It is impossible to proceed while invisible in spirit form.

Leaning over the shadow of the vegetation, Assassin returned from spirit form to physical form, exposing his bony mask and tall, lean figure. He can feel many "eyes" all over him from afar, different from the bounded field of the Tōsaka residence. The familiars of other master’s must be observing the Tōsaka residence from outside the barriers. As long as he remains unnoticed from Tokiomi himself, there is no need to worry about any Peeping Toms. Tokiomi's rivals disputing the Grail would never warn him of Assassin's infiltration. If one competitor drops, the others should remain unconcerned spectators.

Snickering without a sound, Assassin extended his hand at the first keystone that binds the barri—

The next instant, that hand was pierced through by a spear flying from above, shining like a flash of lightning.

"... h!?"

An intense pain, terror, and above all, shock. The simple spear strike was completely unexpected, and Assassin swung his head upward, looking for the thrower.

No, there is no need to search.

On top of the roof of the Tōsaka residence, a golden shadow stands magnificently. That divine radiance even steals the dignity of the starlit sky and puts the moon to shame.

The rage of being wounded made Assassin forget the pain, but he could only fear the overwhelming coercion.

"You worm crawling on the ground, whose pardon do you seek?"

The golden man asks indifferently to the Assassin hidden on the ground, looking down at him with a pair of disdainful, burning crimson eyes.

"You can't look at me. Worms can only look at the ground when they die, like the worms they are."

Around the golden shadow, even more glows appeared, growing to a countless number. Suddenly sliding out of mid-air were swords, halberds, not one of them were the same, all of them treasured weapons with dazzling ornaments. And all of them were aimed at Assassin.

I can't win.

Without even thinking, Assassin realized it instinctively.

Winning against him is impossible. It's stupid to even think about facing him.

If he is able to hit Assassin, a Servant, it means that golden shadow is definitely a Servant. And if he is stopping an invasion into the Tōsaka mansion, then the Master is Tokiomi— In other words, he must be the Heroic Spirit Archer.

There's no need to fear *that*.

In his pledge to his Master, Assassin knew there was no contradiction in Kirei's words.

In front of such an overwhelming enemy, fear is— yes, there is no place for fear—

There can only be despair and abandon.

Slashing through the air in a howl, an infinity of shining blades started raining down on Assassin.

Assassin felt the eyes. The familiars observing from outside the place. The first Servant to fall in the fourth War of the Holy Grail met an unsightly end without even a retort, witnessed by the other Masters.

And at the last moment, Assassin understood. The true intention of his Master, Kotomine Kirei, and... of the leader, Tōsaka Tokiomi.

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Relaxing in a comfortable chair of his room, Tōsaka Tokiomi listened to the roar of the countless Noble Phantasms drilling the ground, tearing flesh to pieces.

"Well, things are looking up. Now..."

The magus muttered to himself, his profile glowing a different gold from the other one under the lamp shade.

Just by its presence, the golden figure stood out in the dimly lit surroundings, like the one on the roof that just executed the invader. Turning into spirit form to come back to Tokiomi's room, then again in physical form, the Servant Archer stood proudly beside his Master, who bore a satisfied face.

The figure looking around is tall and dignified and wearing a golden armor. He is a young man with golden hair standing up like a blazing flame, handsome with an elegant face. His eyes, crimson like blood, are visibly not those of a human, and whoever is stared at cannot but wither in front of their mysterious radiance.

"You made me perform some extremely trifling duty, Tokiomi."

Tokiomi stood up from his chair and bowed respectfully, yet elegantly.

"I am sorry for your trouble, king amongst kings."

As a Master to the summoned Servant, those were manners humbler than expected. But Tōsaka Tokiomi expressed his gratitude without reserve to the Heroic Spirit he had summoned. As someone from a valued lineage himself, Tōsaka Tokiomi can perfectly discern "nobility" better than anyone. He is the guest of honor Tokiomi has summoned to win this fourth Heaven's Feel, not a humble servant, but the greatest hero.

This man, Archer, in the present era, is the "King of Heroes", Gilgamesh. The tyrant who ruled ancient Mesopotamia, part divine, part human. As a hero, rooted in the oldest origin of mankind, he is amongst the oldest kings.

Tokiomi firmly believes in the value of nobility. Even with the supremacy of the Command Seals, or with the best contract, nothing can surpass ranks. Even if he was a Servant, that golden young man was one who deserved the highest honor.

"The outcome of tonight's event will save us a lot of complications. Having witnessed the power of the "King of Heroes", no stray dog will try to bite in vain."

"Mm."

Archer appreciated the truth in Tokiomi's words. Tokiomi and his upright attitude, lost in more flattery than it was necessary, also has no hope in this era. The King of Heroes could understand that.

"In a little while, the field beasts will understand who the hunting lion really is. Please have patience until then."

"Very well. I will just walk off my boredom. This era seems fairly interesting."

At Archer's words, Tokiomi glossed over his slight irritation with a sour look.

Certainly, the Servant he has contracted with is the strongest. But he gives him headaches when he wanders away for his selfish curiosity. In the present world, he hasn't spent even one whole night quietly in the Tōsaka mansion. Tokiomi devoted much effort to keeping Archer inside the mansion for Assassin's raid tonight.

"... Does this era please you?"

"Its ugliness is beyond help. But it does hold love as it is.

What is essential is whether or not there is a treasure worthy of my fortune."

Bragging with a cynical smile, Archer gazes at Tokiomi with his red eyes full of divine authority.

"If there is not a single thing worthy of my favor in this world— the price for summoning me in vain will be heavy, Tokiomi."

"Rest assured. The Grail will definitely catch your attention, King of Heroes."

Confident, Tokiomi replied without fear.

"That will be mine to decide. ... Well, this is fine. For the time being, I will do as you say. Every treasure in this world is mine. Depending on what kind of treasure this Holy Grail is, I will not overlook mongrels fighting for it."

With that haughty declaration, the King of Heroes turned his heels and cancelled his physical form, vanishing like a mist.

"I will be your lion, and I expect to be amused. I will leave the details to you, Tokiomi."

Tokiomi dropped his head at the shadowed voice without a shadow. He didn't stop his reverence until the presence of the Heroic Spirit had disappeared from the room.

"... Well, well."

The magus sighed deeply when the pressure from the golden man went away.

Servants receive certain skills when a class is attributed for the Heroic Spirit in the present world. Those skills are abilities such as Assassin's "Presence Concealment", Caster's "Territory Creation", and Saber's and Rider's "Riding". By the same way, a Servant being assigned the class Archer in the present world possesses the unique skill of "Independent Action".

This ability means he is capable of being severed from the Master supplying prana and act in autonomy; this is useful, for example, if a Master needs to concentrate all of his prana for a single large spell, or if the Master is injured and unable to supply enough prana. Yet on the other hand, it

becomes harder for the Master to have the Servant accompany him and be completely under his control.

As an Archer, Gilgamesh's skill of Independent Action is ranked A. With this alone, he can use Noble Phantasms at will in battle and remain in the present world without the master’s back-up... But by having this, the King of Heroes was able to ignore Tokiomi's inclination and stroll around in Fuyuki City as he wished. Constantly apart from each other, Tokiomi can never be aware of his own Servant's whereabouts, or of what he is doing.

Having not a single interest in his own world, Tokiomi cannot understand what amusement a man like the King of Heroes can find by walking around to watch people's lives.

"Anyway, for now, I can have Kirei handle it. Everything is going as planned for the moment."

Snickering, Tokiomi looked down at the garden through the window. The excess of destruction gouged when Assassin crept in made the scene look like it had been bombed.

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"Assassin— has been killed?"

Disappointed by how quickly it had ended, Waver Velvet opened his eyes.

Until a moment ago, he was spying over the complete turn of the scene at the Tōsaka mansion, and his vision now returned to the room he has gotten used to — on the second floor of the house of the old couple he lived with like a parasite. The image that was behind his eyelids until just then was coming from the vision of a rat familiar. That kind of magecraft is nothing spectacular for Waver.

With the opening of the Heaven's Feel, the first step was obviously for Waver to start by observing the Matō and Tōsaka mansions. There is a detached villa owned by the Einzberns in the forest on the outskirts, but the magus from the North hasn't arrived yet, so there's no reason to observe an empty place.

Nothing had moved yet from both houses, and the masters were growing tired of waiting, wondering about raiding either the Tōsakas or the Matōs;

that was only wishful thinking to ease the observation, but they didn't expect it to actually happen.

"Hey Rider, here's something new. There has been one loss."

The giant, despite being called, was lying there on the floor, and only responded with an "Humph" devoid of motivation, not even turning around.

"..."

Waver was downright pissed.

He had been doing nothing but rest his pained muscles all day in his room —strictly speaking, that was someone else's room, but let's put that detail aside— but Waver couldn't settle down. Even though he had ordered him to go back to spirit form when he wasn't doing anything, Rider had refused, saying he felt "more comfortable in materialized form", and so he has been showing off his giant body all this time. Just dragging on the materialization means a large prana loss for the Master to supply to his Servant; that isn't too much of a problem for Waver, but in those circumstances, Rider is quite unmindful.

Harder to forgive was what Rider was doing while spending Waver's prana, which was... well, nothing, in fact. Even with Waver scornful, he was just resting, relaxed, nonchalantly picking around in a dish and watching a rental video. Can you believe that Servant?

"Hey, did you hear me? Assassin got done in. The Heaven's Feel is starting!"

"Hmm."

"... Hey!"

As Waver was rising his voice with excitation, Rider finally turned around half of his body.

"Yeah, what about some assassin guy? A rat in hiding is not much of an enemy."

"..."

"Anyway, boy, what's amazing is that, here."

Rider turns back to face the CTR as he speaks more heatedly. The cassette is playing "an authentic account on the flight force of the world, part 4"... With a mania for military affair, Rider has put his hand on everything

related, books, images. Of course, providing all of it is Waver's problem. Otherwise the giant Servant would walk in a library or video store, which isn't fine with the Master.

"There, that big black B2 thingy. It's wonderful. I'm thinking about buying ten of those."

"—Just go and buy a country if you have that money."

Waver spat his answer out of frustration, and Rider made a serious face, moaning "Oh yeah..."

"Of course, funds are an important matter... Maybe I should plunder a city as rich as Persepolis."

Apparently, that guy, Rider, has seriously been considered conquering the world and done research on the wars of the current era. Even the information he has received from the Grail has limits. For one, he doesn't know the price of one stealth bomber.

"For the most urgent matters, this Clinton man is a formidable enemy. He might be a stronger enemy than King Darius."

"..."

Waver has endured stomachaches ever since he has summoned that Servant. He'll have a stomach ulcer by the time they get the Grail.

Shutting the giant in front of him out of his consciousness, Waver tried to think positively.

At any rate, it was a good thing for Waver that Assassin was the first to fall. Waver is aware that his own Servant, Rider, with his battle abilities, is the type to go full frontal in a fight. With that in mind, an enemy who can plan out clever tricks is a bigger threat. And Assassin was pretty much the definition of that. An unknown Caster Servant is also a problem, but an Assassin who creeps up without revealing himself was the most direct menace.

The three main Knight classes, Saber, Lancer, Archer, then Berserker who just riots his way, are nothing to be afraid of. Rider's abilities and Noble Phantasms are enough to push them back and win. All that is left is finding out Caster's true name—

"— So, how was Assassin killed?"

Sitting up cross-legged, Rider threw a surprise attack at Waver with his sudden question.

"… Eh?"

"Yeah, the Servant who beat Assassin. Didn't you see him?"

Waver faltered. He did see him— but, just what did he see?

"Must be that Tōsaka Servant… I guess. Looked strong and aggressive, showing off with a lot of shiny-gold things. It took only an instant, so I'm not sure…"

"That's what mattered, fool."

Along with his shocked voice, something burst in the middle of Waver's eyebrows. The completely unexpected pain and the surprise make Waver fall off then tumble flat on his face.

That was Rider's middle finger. Holding it bent by the thumb then shot forward: that's a flick on the forehead. Of course, there was no strength in that. However, when it's Rider's finger, hard as the root of a pine tree, Waver's skin swelled red from the force.

Violence again. Corporal abuse again. Waver was confused between fear and frenzy and was at a loss for words. This is the second time he is hit by his Servant. This is the second time in his whole life. Unable to breathe properly because of anger, Waver opened and closed his mouth like a fish. Ignoring how upset his Master was, Rider drew a deep, grand sigh.

"You know, if I fight, it's to win and survive. What will happen if you can't observe properly?"

"…h"

Waver didn't reply. Rider was right. He doesn't want to hear it from a Servant who does nothing but lie down, eat tea cakes, watch videos, and read, but it's true that there are enemies who can become a problem.

"Oh well, never mind. That shiny-gold or whatever, what impression did he give you?"

"I, I told you that…"

How could he have understood anything in that instant?

For starters, the attack that sent Assassin into oblivion is probably a Noble Phantasm. Even through the eyes of the familiar, he had perceived a huge burst of prana.

Yet the number of weapons that poured down on Assassin—

"... Hey, Rider, Servants usually have just one Noble Phantasm, right?"

"Generally, yes. Sometimes, there are Heroic Spirits who managed to get two or three. I myself, for example, am one of this case."

That's right, the night he arrived in the present world, Rider showed Waver a Noble Phantasm and said it wasn't his only trump card.

"Eh, there's no sense in considering the number of Noble Phantasms. As you must know, Noble Phantasms are the crystallization of the historical facts and anecdotes that made the Heroic Spirit famous, but that doesn't have to be a weapon; it can be a specific ability or a unique mean of attacking."

"... So, throwing ten or twenty weapons at once could be a "Noble Phantasm" in itself?"

"A sword that splits in an infinite number, eh? That could happen. It has the potential of being one "Noble Phantasm", yes."

"..."

Still, what defeated Assassin is yet again something different. Waver did see through the eyes of his familiar that the weapons thrown weren't all the same. That wasn't a multiplication. Those were all unique weapons.

Could they have all been Noble Phantasms after all? That shouldn't be possible. There weren't just one or two blades flooding down on the crawling Assassin.

"Oh well, that's fine, we'll know when we figure out the true identity of the enemy."

Laughing heartily, Rider slapped Waver, who was thinking deeply, on the back. The impact shook his spine and the small magus starts choking. The blow this time wasn't humiliating, but Waver could appreciate some gentler kinship.

"Are, are you quite done!?"

"Good. My heart is in joy."

Rider remarked carelessly with a daring smile.

"Food and sex, sleep and war— enjoy yourself however you want. That's the secret to a man's life."

"..."

Waver couldn't find the fun in that. Or rather, he had no experience in two of those.

"Alright, let's look for some fun outside."

Cracking the muscles in the back of his neck, the giant Servant stretched largely.

"We're departing for the front. Be ready."

"The, front... Where?"

"Over there of course, where else."

"That's nuts!"

Standing up and nearly reaching the ceiling, Rider looked down at Waver's angry face and smiled.

"You're not the only one who was observing the Tōsaka fort. This means Assassin's death is already known. So, they'll all grow tired of looking out for an attack from the shadow, and they'll all start moving together at once. We'll find them and hunt them."

"Find and hunt... Like it'll be that simple..."

"I am Rider. I have predominance over the other Servants going by *foot*, you know?"

With that exaggeration, Rider drew the sword at his waist out of its scabbard. Realizing that he was about to call out that Noble Phantasm, Waver stopped him confusedly.

"Waitwaitwait! You can't do that here. You'll blow up the house!"

※※※※※

That night, the expected visitor appeared at the Fuyuki Church on the hill of the Shinto suburb.

"Following the Heaven's Feel agreement, I, Kotomine Kirei, request the protection from the Holy Church."

"I accept. Conforming to my duty as a supervisor, I, Kotomine Risei, will guarantee your security. Come inside."

To the two men who had arranged everything, this was a laughable farce, but they couldn't know if there wasn't still someone spying at the gate. Kotomine Risei feigned strictly his role of supervisor with a grave face, and invited his son, weakened by his defeat as a Master, inside the Church.

With many residents from outside, Fuyuki has a lot more people coming at the church than the other towns; despite being in the Far East, this church of Fuyuki is the center of the belief from Western Europe, giving it a genuine splendor. However, the resting place of ordinary Christians is nothing more than a camouflage, as the church was built in this place by the Holy Church specifically for the Heaven's Feel. Being the third best spiritual place, it matches the mansion of the Second Owner of this earth, the Tōsaka family.

Obviously, the Father who has come here and taken over the supervision of the struggle to the death between master’s and Servants is a member of the Assembly of the 8th Sacrament. In other words, the priest who has been administrating the daily religious service for the ordinary Christians is no other than Kotomine Risei.

"I see everything has been carried out without problem."

Leading Kirei through the priest’s house, Father Risei dropped his acting and nodded with a serious face.

"Father, who is watching over the church?"

"Nobody is. This neutral ground has guaranteed inviolability. The Church dissuades Master from interfering unnecessarily. On top of that agreement, the defeated ones are of no interest."

"We will have tranquility, then."

Sitting on the chair that was offered to him, Kirei sighed deeply. Then—

"We shouldn't neglect vigilance, to be sure. There should always be someone."

He speaks with a cold-hearted, commanding tone to nobody. Of course, his words aren't addressed to his father. Father Risei beside him doesn't see the speech of his son as strange.

"— Also, was anyone observing the scene?"

"Yes, that is me."

This time, a voice responded to the question Kirei had apparently asked at an empty space. A woman. Under cover in the corner of the room, a female appeared in black clothing that seem to boil.

Neither Kirei nor Risei raised an eyebrow to that appearance. —But the appearance of the woman was that of one that shouldn't be here.

Jet black robe wrapping a soft stature, a symbolic skull mask hiding her face, this costume is without a doubt that of the Heroic Spirit of assassination, Hassan-I Sabbāh.

"There were traces of four different types of familiar at the place of Assassin's death. I believe there are at least four masters who have witnessed the scene."

"Hm... We are missing one."

Narrowing his eyes as if to think, Kirei looked at his father at his side.

"The 'spirit board' definitely indicated the arrival of seven Servants, didn't it, father?"

"Yes, without a doubt. The last one, 'Caster', arrived two days ago. As usual, the names of the master’s weren't given, but all the Servants of this Grail War must be present."

"I see..."

Kirei would have preferred all five people to witness this night's farce.

"Observing the mansion of each of the three main families should be a given for all master’s participating in the Heaven's Feel."

The woman in a skull mask standing at his side — the one who cannot be anyone but Hassan-I Sabbāh spoke her opinion.

"If there is anyone with the nerves to ignore their guard like that, they are too careless for us Assassin to begin with. Is this conclusion satisfactory?"

"Mm."

If the Master Kotomine Kirei had lost his Servant, the Seals carved on his hand should have disappeared. But the three deep black stigmas were still carved there.

In brief... The Servant Assassin hasn't been annihilated. Then the masked woman who was currently serving the two Kotomines must be the real Hassan-I Sabbāh.

"Is it regrettable that the man died?"

The woman shook her head with an air of indifference at Kotomine's question.

"That man was one of us Hassan’s who didn't have any particular forte. Losing only him does not affect us as a whole. Still—"

"Still, what?"

"I cannot say his death affects us, but a loss is a loss. You could say it is like losing a finger. I do not wish to think he was a vain sacrifice."

Kirei listened intently as the woman put forth her growing protest through her humility. Of course, that was not unreasonable.

"That is not vain. You can deceive the other master’s by sacrificing one finger. They all already believe Assassin has fallen. Do you not think all of you can now turn the tide of battle under cover?"

"Indeed, you speak the truth."

The woman in black clothing bowed her head deeply.

This time, thinking Assassin has been removed, nobody will expect the Heroic Spirit of shadows to creep up behind their back. Who would know—that the Servant Assassin was still kneeling in front of the Master who had ran to the Church?

Even for those competing for the miracle called the Heaven's Feel, that was evidently a strange situation.

Indeed, the name of Hassan-I Sabbāh doesn't refer to just one person. The name Hassan, that means "old man of the mountain", was once the root of the word "assassin", a name passed down to the head of a group of assassins in the Middle East. This means that historically, there are several Heroic Spirits with the name of Hassan. Of course, it isn't a miracle that there was one female Hassan.

But as a general rule, there can be only one Assassin summoned for the Heaven's Feel. It is theoretically possible to have control over two Servants by taking one from another Master but having over two Assassins simultaneously means it is obvious a rule has been bypassed.

"At any rate, this marks the opening of the hostilities."

The exaggerated voice of the dignified old priest was filled with anticipation for victory.

"The Fourth Heaven's Feel has begun. It seems these old bones of mine will witness a miracle this time."

Unable to share the enthusiasm of his father, Kirei silently gazed at a dim-lit corner of the priest’s house.

Act 3

Act 3

-162:26:39

Fuyuki city, Shinto—

The housing district at the east of the Mion River is a new town reclaimed from a once empty wasteland; it is different from the history the Miyama town originally has, but it is being refined in a large-scale redevelopment project from the government to build a modern business district over the ancient site.

The buildings in the area planned as a business district are only 40% complete, but the maintenance of the park and shopping mall in front of the

station is already done; the future plans are already done for the Shinto district to be clean and sterile, pompous and with no individuality. The city hall is also being moved piece by piece to Shinto, revived with modern iron, glass, and mortar, stealing all central municipal functions from Miyama.

It is already crowded even during holidays. In the middle of the crowd going back and forth, cowering from the northern wind, Emiya Kiritsugu disappeared, colorless and odorless without attracting any attention.

His shirt and coat worn for a long time and his lack of baggage give him a slacking appearance that wouldn't make you think of someone who has immigrated. As a matter of fact, he has been like that since he walked in the country up to Shinto in Fuyuki, but Japan still remains his native country. Being used to coming and going, he still felt better in this country.

With a complex feeling, Kiritsugu looked down on the cigarette paper package he had just bought from a vending machine.

It's been 9 years he has stopped smoking. He hasn't been able to find his favorite brand in the far land of the Einzberns, but that was mainly in regard for the mother and child. Just as he came down at the Fuyuki station, prepared for battle, he had thrown a coin in the vending machine out of habit.

Since he has bought a disposable lighter from a convenience store to get back the sensation, he breaks open the cigarette pack. The white of the row of filters is dazzling.

He put one in his mouth and lit it. As if there wasn't a blank of 10 years, he was able to redo the movements naturally. The aroma flowing into his lungs, he got used to the taste as if he had been doing it just the day before.

"..."

Kiritsugu looks at the transformed scenery, completely different from the one he vividly remembers in his heart.

He visited Fuyuki in reconnaissance under cover three years earlier, but the face of Shinto has completely changed since then. This isn't unexpected, but this is beyond what he imagined. He needs to confirm the neighborhood again.

Despite the slight difficulty from the transformation of the area, Kiritsugu reached the hotel he wanted.

The lobby and the front have been arranged, but the interior is a fairly cheap business hotel. Families or wanderers, this hotel is a good harbor for quite a wide genre of users.

Acting as if he knew the place, Kiritsugu walks through the lobby up to the elevator, up to the seventh floor. This is where his faithful subordinate has been for three days, in room 73.

In the world of magi, his relationship with Hisau Maiya would be that of a pupil and a teacher.

But to Kiritsugu, who saw magecraft as a mere tool he has acquired knowledge in, and not as the object of his quest, there wasn't a single sense of master and pupil. What he has taught to Maiya is merely a "way to fight". This too is only for the purpose of counting her as a "tool". This is from a time when he went through countless desperate battles for a utopia that could never be fulfilled, when he didn't know about the existence of the Grail.

Hence his connection to Maiya is older than the one with Irisviel. Having fought at his side, Maiya knows of the blood-stained side of Kiritsugu that his wife has never seen.

As he knocked at a pre-arranged rhythm on the door of room 73, the door opened immediately as if he had been expected. Skipping unnecessary greetings with a mere glance at each other, Kiritsugu enters the room and closes the door.

Maiya has already been involved for a while. After Kiritsugu retreated, she has arranged the preparations for the Grail War according to the instructions given by Kiritsugu from overseas and has been busy with returning to the Einzbern castle many times.

Handsome, fair-skinned, she was a beauty who used neither eyeliner nor lipstick. Her long eyes and her gaze seem to be always scrutinizing suspiciously, but she deliberately leaves an impression of indifference. Her jet black, silk-like straight hair catch the glance of many men but her cold, sharp look definitely makes any lady-killer give up.

Anyway, they have known each other for over 10 years. She was still a young girl when they met, but since she isn't a child anymore, she sharpened her sagacity as a characteristic; when with that type of beauty, normal people tire easily, Kiritsugu was the opposite. She is a woman who constantly saw the reality and could sometimes give out an accurate judgment more merciless than Kiritsugu. With her, Kiritsugu didn't have to

be ashamed of his foul plays or detest his cruelty. This could put him to some sort of rest.

"The Tōsaka mansion moved last night."

Maiya started by jumping straight to the point.

"Please watch the records of it. Also, all the equipment has arrived."

"Understood. First, the situation."

Nodding, Maiya switches the decoder of the unpacked television.

Amongst the magecraft Kiritsugu had taught her, Maiya was particularly capable in the management of regular familiars, and Kiritsugu often entrusted her with scouting or reconnaissance missions. This time again, Kiritsugu has assigned her to the surveillance of the Matō and Tōsaka mansions.

The familiars Maiya has pride in are bats, but unlike other magi, her bats have a miniature CCD camera tied on the abdomen. Of course, this is an idea of Kiritsugu. The illusions and camouflaged bounded fields of magi are often based on using suggestions on an observer, but that sort of things often forget about electronic-based counter measures. Video records are also helpful for re-watching, so even considering it slows down the familiar the joint use of cameras is a viable solution.

The whole scene of the previous night is replayed on the 13-inch CTR. The blurred image is enough to understand the whole event. Without raising an eyebrow, Kiritsugu watches the Servant with a skull mask unable to escape annihilation from the golden Servant.

The white mask of the defeated Servant is without a doubt of the Assassin class.

"What do you make of it?"

"I think it is going too well."

Maiya replied immediately to Kiritsugu's question.

"The time lag between Assassin's materialization and the attack of Tōsaka's Servant is too short. He was waiting for him. I could accept he might have detected an intruder in spirit form, but his opponent is an Assassin with the Presence Concealment ability. ... I wonder if Tōsaka wasn't aware of the invasion prior to it."

Kiritsugu nodded. Having been trained by him, Maiya's conclusion was the same as Kiritsugu's.

"The more I think of it, the more it seems like an arrangement. Why did Tōsaka expose his Servant like that if he had such a margin?"

The Tōsaka family has obviously accumulated experience from the second and third Grail fights. There is no way they don't know the other master’s would be observing the Tōsaka mansion.

The Heaven's Feel is a confrontation between heroes who have gained fame. And the legends of these heroes include a lot of information on their fighting patterns and their strong and weak points. This means it is natural that the skills and weaknesses of the Heroic Spirits are known from the beginning.

And so, it has become an ironclad rule to hide the true identity of the Heroic Spirits in the war between Servants. In light of this, Heroic Spirits are all called by their class to avoid revealing their true name.

Last night, Tōsaka has left two clues to the other Masters, being what his Servant looks like, as well as showing a method that looks like a Noble Phantasm. Neither were enough to definitely identify the Servant, but that was a risk that should have been easy to avoid. If he was to bring down Assassin, he could have done so outside of plain view.

"Showing us something he didn't have to show us— that means he wanted to show it to us."

Kiritsugu nods again at Maiya's conclusion.

"Possibly. If there is any merit in doing that, then the explanation is obvious. ... Maiya, what happened to the Master of Assassin?"

"He went to the Church last night and has requested the supervisor's protection. It is the man called Kotomine Kirei."

Hearing that name, Kiritsugu's eye lit with a cold ghastliness.

"Maiya, send a familiar to the Fuyuki Church. One will be fine for now."

"... Is it alright? The Church is an area where aggressions between master’s are prohibited."

"Unless the priest supervisor doesn't find out. Stay at a reasonable distance. Don't overdo it. He doesn't have to know."

Maiya frowned at Kiritsugu’s incomprehensible instructions.

"Must I observe the Church?"

"You can just make it a 'regular patrolling'. What you must concentrate on is being absolutely not-discovered."

"... Yes, understood."

Maiya couldn't understand what Kiritsugu had in mind but didn't question him. She at once picks one of the three bats observing the Tōsaka mansion and sent it the thought of going to the Fuyuki Church at the end of Shinto.

Kiritsugu turned off the TV, then resumed inspecting the equipment Maiya prepared.

In the various tools lined up on the sheet of the bed, awaiting Kiritsugu's check-up, there was not one a magus could find interesting. Not a single ritualistic catalyst like a dagger, cup, talisman, elixir or spiritual container. They were state-of-art and highly efficient, but apart from that, they were nothing but conventional weapons. Nothing that could store prana.

That was the heresy that earned the magus Emiya Kiritsugu the nickname of "magus killer."

The weak point of the people called magi was usually negligence from arrogance. They believe in their own mysteries and knowledge. They never doubt that the only threat to them beside God cannot be anything other than a magus like them.

That is why, in battle, they are sensitive to nothing but traces of magecraft. To detect any kind of trivial skill. Hence, they train their perception of magecraft, and think of countermeasures against those skills as derisive— That's a theory no magus strays from.

As a result, they ignore any attack that is purely physical and void of magecraft as secondary menace. They have no fear of the sharpest knife, the strongest bullet, until the instant they actually pierce the flesh of a magus. And before that happens, the strength of magecraft grants illusions, paralysis methods, or defensive bounded fields, able to completely negate any vulgar attacks.

But they despise technology. What a human who doesn't rely on magecraft can do— a lot of magi cannot recognize that.

The attack the enemy doesn't expect is a shortcut for all battles. Kiritsugu has reached a conclusion from a large number of battles-to-the-death between magi. That is, magi are weak to non-magical attacks.

Applying that conclusion to the circumstances of the Heaven's Feel of Fuyuki, Maiya has prepared a set of equipment. Among them, the rifle lying on the sheet is what gives out the strongest smell of varnish. That was a work of art that was the crystallization of the newest electronic techniques along with a ferocious shape.

The base is a Walther WA2000 semi-automatic sniper rifle. A rifle with a total length a little above 90 centimeters, in a compact size; the bullpup structure with a gas-operated magazine gives the gun barrel a length of 65 centimeters. The .300 Winchester Magnum shell has an effective range of 1000 meters. In the modern world, this is a rifle of the highest class, with the highest performance. The high cost of $12,000 is due to how it was one of the only 154 units produced for this legendary gun.

Instead of the standard sighting device made by Smith & Bender, Kiritsugu had simultaneously installed a pair of lined-up devices as a special scope mount, above the barrel and on the left flank, both extra-large optic devices fixed in parallel.

On the main side was the latest night vision scope, the best of the US armed force, an AN/PVS04. The equipment, some sort of super sensitive video camera, is a simple light electrical amplifier with a lens, raising and displaying a perfect brightness. It is a real electronic "owl eye" that multiplies the range of vision by 3.6, 600 yards under the moonlight or 400 yards in starlight. Essentially, it is the latest equipment used by the US armed force, banned from exportation to prevent technology leaking.

Furthermore, in addition a specter IR heat detector scope is installed as a sideways support. This one is also electronically equipped for night vision, although the image display isn't an intensity amplifier, but displays the heat patterns of the subject. It can perceive temperature variations from -5 to 60°C up to 200 meters with a 1.8 magnification.

Having discovered that the operation of Magic Circuits changed the temperature of the practitioner, Kiritsugu had studied and trained so much that he was now able to read, through the thermal output, the current status of the Magic Circuits by viewing the heat distribution. Viewing the clear difference between an ordinary person and a magus, it is possible to seize an opportunity after the release of prana. The joint use of both bulky night vision devices is not just for nighttime battle, but also a configuration to specifically face against a magus.

Despite the steady progress on miniaturization, year after year, of the non-magical innovations, a night vision device roughly remains at the size of a plastic bottle and is too bulky to be compared to regular optic devices. On top of the rash, compact design of the gun barrel, the enormous pair of scopes gives a clumsy air of unbalance. The total weight of the gun exceeds 10 kilos. It is already a weapon worthy for a support fire squad more than a sniping weapon. The main equipment was already hindering practical use, but that was a challenge Kiritsugu had calculated at best.

When compared to magecraft, this night-vision sniping gun certainly falls behind. Magecraft can let you see better through the dark, and it is also possible to detect the position of an enemy magus. But with this gun, Kiritsugu is able to shoot down a target without releasing any prana.

In the dark, unable to detect any prana, the possibility of being hit from several hundred meters away— it is a situation a pro soldier wouldn't count as incomprehensible, but a lot of magi are really novices in such conditions. In fact, a self-conscious magus who has stepped into a world of mysteries beyond human intellect cannot relate to the stereotypes of a narrower world.

Kiritsugu picked up the super heavyweight class sniper gun from the bed, checked the smoothness of the breechblock and the weight of the trigger, and made sure it was in the best condition.

"There is no correction up to 500 meters. Do you want to check it?"

"No, it's fine."

He would have wanted to not only check the alignment, but also get a grasp of the shooting, but with the constitutional government of Japan, that was unfortunately not easy. With the Grail War hostilities having already started, he might have to use the gun this very night. Kiritsugu fully trusts Maiya's preparations.

The other rifle that was prepared, in addition to the Walther sniping gun, is for Maiya who will be acting as a vanguard scout, a Styr AUG assault gun. Its night vision scope has also been replaced, like Kiritsugu's, and surprisingly, the weight is under 5 kg.

Furthermore, a Calico M950 submachine gun is ready as a reserve side arm. The compact size is not different from a large handgun, and the reinforced plastic makes it look more like a toy than the Walther sniping gun; but the unique magazine with a system called helical allows for 50 Parabellum rounds, with a firing rate of 700 shots per minute for a brutal armament.

The rest includes personal hand grenades and stun grenades, smoke grenades, and C2 plastic explosive. Following the instructions Kiritsugu sent from the north, Maiya had arranged to prepare the equipment without allowing any leak. But Kiritsugu's expressionless eyes don't look satisfied yet.

"And the one I entrusted to you?"

"... It is here."

Maiya reverentially pulled a rosewood case with both hands from the bottom of the closet. It seems that this reverence has somehow stiffened even further the beautiful face that never smiles.

Taking the case, Kiritsugu placed it on the side table, unfastening the clasps and opening the lid with an expert hand.

The armament on the bed is all brand-new weapons for this day. The assets of the Einzbern family certainly allow the funds and connection necessary to arrange the gathering of brand new, sharp equipment despite its exorbitant cost with much difficulty.

But inside that rosewood case, the handgun sleeping in a long silence isn't something money can buy. This is the weapon Kiritsugu has favored on a lot of battlefields, which he has entrusted to Maiya when he retired 9 years ago, unique in the world, a weapon for Kiritsugu's use only.

The high-tech equipment that can be obtained with money is an armament for Emiya Kiritsugu as the 'Magus Killer'. But there also existed a weapon for the 'magus' Emiya Kiritsugu. That is, a 'Mystic Code'— a weapon through which a magus can use magecraft in battle.

Thompson Center's Contender. A grip and fore end carved in walnut; a gun barrel 14-inch-long, reminiscent of a dagger in its scabbard. The handgun parts are only the trigger and the percussion hammer, then the cylinder and slide cannot be found on the simple exterior, which makes it close to a percussion pistol from the last hours of the Middle Ages.

Actually, the Contender is a single shot pistol with a break-open cartridge chamber. This gun is essentially a pistol for target shooting sport; but Kiritsugu's gun barrel has been switched to make use of the hunting specifications of the large caliber, and furthermore, it has been magically modified to make use of "magic bullets" for rifling.

The bullets used are .30-06 Springfield. A cartridge with a bottleneck structure, its size and power level are already different from those of a

handgun bullet. The .30-06 is 10% stronger than the .308 Winchester bullet, and even surpasses the hand canon class of a Magnum bullet. Discharged from a handgun, it would have extreme firepower.

But the true menace of this gun is not the destructive power of physical explosives and warheads.

The special bullets installed along with the gun in the case— in the core of the twelve remaining shots are sealed powdered bones from Kiritsugu himself. When Kiritsugu's prana is fired, these "magical bullets" forces into the target the 'origin' of the magus named Kiritsugu. So, to speak, one could call it an imitation of a conceptual weapon.

Technology becomes the blind spot of magi who stick to magecraft... In the end, this is only a tendency, and doesn't reverse the generality. Indeed, a lot of magi in the world can be defeated with means like a night vision and a heat sensor scope. Nevertheless, there are exceptions that cannot be measured with rules and experience. The generality against a magus is that there aren't many magi who deviate even further from that generality. Kiritsugu calls these opponents "formidable enemies".

Against a "formidable enemy" for who artifice won't work— Kiritsugu, as a single magus, must stand up when he runs out of secrets. At that time, this Contender becomes Kiritsugu's most powerful fang.

Rewinding the clock in his heart, Kiritsugu picked the Contender from the case. In the past, the walnut gun had absorbed the transpiration of Kiritsugu's hand countless times, and after a blank of 9 years, it still fit perfectly into his hand and fingers.

Whether it's the hand gripping the handle, or the handle gripping the hand, that is an indistinct feeling. With just a little strength in the fingers, the gun might just fuse with the bones of his hand and become an extension of his arm.

Cautiously pulling the spool with his index finger, the chamber lock is released and collapses soundly. Sliding a bullet from the same case into the opened chamber, he then closes the barrel again with a snap of his wrist. With the added ammunition, the overall weight is now 2.6 kg. Kiritsugu's right hand gives a familiar response.

At the old feeling, Kiritsugu's chest hurt when he thought that he got too used to the touch of a dangerous weapon.

At the end, will his hand remember so perfectly the touch of his wife and daughter?

Their tender cheeks, their slender fingers, how much of it will Kiritsugu remember?

Picking another bullet from the case, Kiritsugu replayed the reloading process that had dyed his hands.

Pulling the rim of the exposed cartridge with his fingertips from the opened chamber, he slides in a second bullet, and immediately slams the gun barrel close—

It took him two seconds. Bad thoughts dull his manipulations.

"... I've gotten rusty."

"Yes."

To Kiritsugu, murmuring in self-derision, Maiya nodded without consideration. She knew the old skills of her partner. Kiritsugu pulled the bullet he had loaded in the gun, picked the other one he had dropped on the floor, and placed everything back in the case with the Contender.

"Ilya's body is even lighter than the Walther here. And she's already 8 years old..."

Letting free his shameful memories on his own, Kiritsugu started loosening alone. Maiya's movement, barging in behind his back, stopped his train of thoughts.

Agile like a snake, her hand rolled around Kiritsugu's neck, seizing the back of his head, blocking his movements, and his mouth— she took his soft, dried lips.

The taste and touch of a different woman from the one in his heart. Breaking off the man's homesickness, but that was too quick to be forgiven.

"... Please only focus of what's necessary for now. Don't think of what you don't need."

In a blurred voice that had traces of her usage of her tongue left, Maiya quietly commanded Kiritsugu.

"..."

Without a word, Kiritsugu felt the sensation in his chest calm down. In his heart cooling off, the pain is already vanishing away in a mist.

This is the woman she is. She is the woman into whom Kiritsugu himself has raised a girl once found on a battlefield.

A supporting machine whose actions are even more akin to a machine than those of the machine called Emiya Kiritsugu. This is Hisau Maiya. An indispensable final weapon for Kiritsugu to win this battle... That is none other than that woman.

-162:27:03

Just at the time Emiya Kiritsugu and Hisau Maiya were meeting in a cheap hotel of Shinto, the Volare Italia charter coming from Germany was landing on the F lane of the airport neighboring Fuyuki City.

Even under the same frozen wind of winter, the one of Japan can't be compared to the intensity of that of the Einzbern castle. Looking up at the soft sunlight of the early afternoon, Irisviel von Einzbern feels her heart lighten.

"So, this is the country Kiritsugu was born in..."

It is a good place. Although she could get to know the place with pictures and such, Irisviel felt refreshed feeling the air through her body.

Not only her heart lightens. Coming to Japan posing as a passenger, she couldn't bring dresses for the castle, but had to bring more common clothing as much as possible to at least get to know the town. With short heeled boots and a knee-long skirt, her movements felt as light as if she was reborn.

Nonetheless, to an Einzbern who lived a secluded life oblivious of the common sense of the outside world, the dress-up she thought would be fit of common garments was already off. Her silk blouse, her thigh-high long boots, her casual coat with silver fox fur, everything was coming straight out of a high-class display window; it was very visible that she was a rare gem from a particular birthplace with a particular tailoring. They were clothes clearly fit for a fashion model, but to Irisviel who grew up with polished jewelry, it seemed intimate enough; even, Irisviel had indeed considered it a camouflage for towns areas, but it was simply impossible for a beauty such as her to disappear in the general public to begin with.

"So, Saber? What did you think of the plane travel?"

One step ahead down the runway, Irisviel asks the Servant with a short stature, who is leaving the lap that continues further.

"Nothing in particular. It was more wearisome than expected."

There is no lie in her words. Her jade green eyes are perfectly serene.

"Oh, too bad, I thought you would be more surprised and interested."

"... Irisviel, you must be thinking of me as a primitive person."

To the frowning Saber, Irisviel replied with a bright laugh void of any ill intention.

"Flying in the sky is nothing surprising for a Heroic Spirit?"

"Not exactly, but as a Servant summoned in the present world, I have received information about this era. Also, as a Saber, I possess a skill dedicated to Riding. Presently, I might be able to ride this airplane."

Hearing that, Irisviel's eyes go around from astonishment.

"You could— pilot it?"

"Probably. My riding skill applies to all vehicles. If I can sit on a saddle and seize a bridle, I can manage the rest from instinct."

Irisviel burst into laughter from Saber's expression. She hasn't seen the cockpit. What would she think when seeing one filled with gauges instead of her saddle and bridle?

Be that as it may, she said the truth about skills. The mounting ability of the Saber class allows the use of any vehicle save for phantasmal beasts and divine beasts. If needed, she could definitely handle modern tools like a car or a bike.

"I'm still a little disappointed. You must be the first Servant ever to travel in a plane with a flesh and blood body."

"... I must apologize about that. I am not a good reference."

"Oh, it's fine. —Don't worry. That isn't what I meant."

Foreign Masters have to travel to Japan one way or another, but Irisviel and her Servant posing together as a party of two must be an exception.

The cause was Saber. Despite being a Heroic Spirit, she had limits other Servants didn't have. The gravest amongst these was that she could not dematerialize. She didn't have the ability to cancel her physical form to move at high speed or cut down the prana consumption from her Master when at rest, something all Servants should be able to do. It's not that there had been a mistake in Kiritsugu's contract or his summoning: the soul of the hero named Artoria functioned differently from the other Heroic Spirits... Apparently. For a reason unknown to even Irisviel.

The most problematic burden was that she was unable to turn invisible and hide her existence to the other people. There was no way she would walk under her armor suit, so Saber had to dress up as a human with a costume of the latest fashion and accompany Irisviel.

—Although, Irisviel found rather welcome that Saber would follow her in convenient garments.

"I am happy I could travel with you, Saber. I can't get tired of looking at you."

"? Irisviel, why the change?"

"No, It's nothing. Don't mind that."

Hiding a smile, Irisviel turns her head away. Saber finds that reaction suspicious.

"... It means you are holding something when you laugh like that. Tell me frankly what it is."

"It is not a problem if you always remain in physical form, really. I get to have fun choosing your clothes, like that."

"..."

How carefree— Saber wanted to reply but sighed instead. Being unable to dematerialize is essentially a drawback that can't be dealt with for the Master. Enjoying oneself isn't the primary objective but telling the Master it is no laughing matter would be mistaking the cause for the end.

"Irisviel, are these clothing’s fit to look around in town?"

"Yes, ... I guess. It is my first time in this country as well, so I am a little anxious."

If a third party with the common sensibility of a Japanese had happened to be present, he would have definitely been able to tell that Irisviel was different.

Irisviel had taken Saber's measurements before their departure and issued orders to get modern clothing at a tailor of the Frankfurt airport for a dark blue dress shirt and necktie with a French continental dark suit. That was perfect to disguise her as a man.

It would sound wild and foolish to dress a young woman of under 155 centimeters like that, but this is suddenly a different matter when speaking about Saber.

This isn't the perverted beauty of having a beautiful woman dressed as a man. The air of Saber's cold and hard face isn't that of a feminine complexion. It was already a given that her disguising as a man was unequalled as a beautiful young man. Along with her thin stature, her face was obviously glamorous and fair-skinned, which could pass as the manly, charming air of a pure young man.

"I chose the clothes to balance with my appearance, maybe you do not like them?"

"Ah, not at all. This costume allows me to move freely, and I am used to posing as a man."

The necessity of slipping out of her armored clothing was obvious, but there was no denying Irisviel had jumped straight into a dressing-up hobby more than it was required.

Entrusting to the two maids who had come with them the luggage’s coming out from the cargo area, Irisviel and Saber turned to the customs house with empty hands. After the two maids had sent the luggage to the Einzbern villa in the forest on the outskirts of Fuyuki City by a different route, they arranged their return to home. They were not to remain at Irisviel's side for this Heaven's Feel. There is no need to put in danger people who aren't related. On that matter, Irisviel would care for her personal belongings by herself, and the strong-hearted Saber would remain by her side.

Completing without delay the procedure to enter the country, it didn't take much time until they were allowed to get to the airport lobby. But until they could reach it, every single one of the officials on the way got astounded by

Irisviel and Saber and rolled their eyes as they passed, quickly making them uneasy.

"As I thought... Is there something wrong with my clothes?"

Sensing the eyes of the people coming and going in the lobby, Saber mutters as if feeling awkward.

"Well, it might be too elegant..."

Irisviel could only smile bitterly, but to tell the truth, she too was the center of attention. At any rate, the two of them are unequalled beauties. Their eccentric clothing, how removed from common sense they are, balances their rash match rather well. The attention from the surroundings was not just odd glances, but already envious ones.

"— Let's go, Saber. Worrying won't change much."

Saying so, Irisviel pulled Saber's hand with a bitter face.

"At last we are in Japan. We must enjoy ourselves as much as possible before the battle begins."

"No, Irisviel, the question isn't about enjoying—"

As Saber stretched her mumbling halfway, Irisviel walked like on springs to find a taxi. Somehow, Saber hadn't noticed until now how lively she was shining.

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Soon after the two arrived in Fuyuki City, sunset colored the western sky as it was quite late in the afternoon.

"How lively..."

As the hired car was going down the plaza of the park in front of the station, Irisviel's impression lit her eyes as she was exposed to the traffic jam of the evening hours.

But Saber by her side was studying the surroundings just like a commander investigating the topography of a battlefield.

"Kiritsugu has already arrived in this place, hasn't he?"

"Yes. He arranged to arrive half a day before us."

Already inside the country, Kiritsugu was to hide his existence and follow a completely different route from that of Irisviel's group. He was to take a passenger flight to the international airport at Shin-Ōsaka and change for the railroad to Fuyuki City.

"Are we to meet up again?"

"It's alright. He will be the one to come to us."

Saber wouldn't show any of it, but she was quite shocked by Kiritsugu and Irisviel's plans that she didn't quite find satisfactory.

"Then, what is the plan, now?"

"Right... For now, we shall observe the changes in the situation and adapt ourselves accordingly."

"Do you mean we have nothing to do?"

"Exactly."

Irisviel gave a childish smile that looked mischievous to the discouraged Saber.

"But what a waste. After finally arriving to this distant country."

Smiling while watching the traffic jam around, Irisviel strolled a little dispirited. At her side, Saber, feeling confused, firmly followed her pace.

"And— what about trying to find an enemy Servant?"

"Hmm. No way."

Refusing blankly, Irisviel turned around, staring expectantly at her partner.

"Say, Saber. Since we have such an opportunity, we could look around the town. It must be interesting."

"..."

For an instant, Saber was taken aback by the unexpected proposition, but immediately straightened up with a stern face.

"Irisviel. We cannot be unprepared. We have to consider the land of Fuyuki we are walking in as an enemy territory already. The Heaven's Feel has already started."

"Yes. I depend on you for that, Saber. If we come near a Servant, can you notice it?"

"Well… That is correct."

Dematerialized or not, Servants can perceive the presence of other Servants. Of course, everyone has their own affinity with searching for the enemy, and there are those like Assassin who have the ability to erase their presence.

"In my case, I am able to perceive a presence in a radius of up to roughly 200 meters. Also, an opponent with the proper ability could tamper with that."

"I see… But right here and right now, there is no Servant targeting us, is there?"

"Indeed. But—"

"Then let's have a look around over there. We don't have to search anyway."

When seeking a hidden opponent, striding across the town provocatively was certainly an acceptable plan. An audacious one, but since Saber has no ability for searching actively, there is no other way to do a proactive search. Being unable to dematerialize, she also loses the choice of doing covert espionage.

But more than being based on a coherent plan, Saber sensed that Irisviel had a hidden motive. Actually, Saber could only see Irisviel's invitation as a mere sightseeing jaunt.

"Irisviel, we really should establish somewhere and reunite with Kiritsugu to work out a plan. Hasn't the Einzbern family prepared a castle on the outskirts of the town?"

"Well… Yes, we have that."

It was Irisviel's turn to start mumbling. Apparently, she was conscious that her behavior wasn't fit for a situation of crisis. Guessing there was a reason, Saber asked again.

"Why do you insist so much on visiting this town?"

"You know… This is my first time."

A little nervous, Irisviel looked down as she replied. Saber sighed from the shock.

"—As you know, by being taken over by the Grail, I have knowledge of this world. Of course, I also know about this land that will become a battlefield. Irisviel, this town isn't really a place for sight-seeing. Especially since there are no particularly famous places."

"No, that isn't it. That is not what I—"

Like a child, strongly refusing to give any explanation at first, Irisviel then hesitated a little and finally confessed frankly.

"I— this is the first time I have gone out."

"… Ha?"

Not understanding at first, Saber kept listening, dumbfounded.

"As I say, like a rebirth— this is the first time I have walked in the outside world."

"Then ever since you were born… You have stayed in that castle all your life?"

Not liking the conclusion, Irisviel hung her head in shame, giving a small nod.

"I am a puppet created only for this Heaven's Feel. The elder has always told me I had no need to go out."

Saber didn't really have a life full of joy as Artoria either.

But she couldn't avoid feeling compassion toward this person who had been like a bird in cage, imprisoned in that frozen castle ever since she was born.

"Of course, It's not like I don't know anything, right? Especially since Kiritsugu came. He taught me a lot of the scenery and the happenings, with movies or pictures. About New York, Paris, and all the people in the world. About Japan too, of course."

Smiling miserably, Irisviel looked at the traffic jam around.

"But... This is the first time I have seen this world with my own eyes. So, maybe I am being a little too happy and merry. I'm sorry."

Saber nodded, quietly turning her eyes, and gently offered her arm wrapped in her dark suit to Irisviel.

"... Saber?"

"This is my first time walking in this town — but escort is also the duty of a knight. So, I will do my best. Then, if you please."

"—Thank you."

Her eyes lit with a bright joy, Irisviel entwines her arm around Saber's elbow.

There must be a lot of time left before the night.

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Saber and Irisviel easily drew all the attention in the middle of the business district.

The young woman was full of dignity, with her glittering silver hair and cashmere coat, by no mean pompous, but definitely nicely fitting, walking with a good-looking young man with a brilliant face, holding her arm. That wasn't a combination you'd see anywhere except outside of a cocktail party filled with movie stars.

Those visions coming straight from the silver screen are now leisurely striding through the road of a Japanese provincial city. Anyone walking down the road would stop to look and forget walking for an instant.

The two didn't have the harmony of a couple at a date, nor the admiration of people just sightseeing, only following the flow of their journey, walking aimlessly. Sometimes, they would suddenly stop to happily gaze at the setting sun shining in the windows of the buildings and the show windows, nothing special; they wouldn't enter any shop to make any expense nor sit at a cafe terrace to rest.

Like two understanding outsiders, they would simply slip in the noisy surroundings, watching over the working life of the city from a fixed distance.

Unnoticed, the winter sun had completely sunk behind the mountain range, leaving the curtain of night to reveal a different face of the urban area. Irisviel sighed, entranced by the colorful illuminations of the twinkling scenery.

The world is probably full of towns with a more beautiful night view than that of this Fuyuki city. But Irisviel was deeply moved by the night before her eyes, as if putting her hands on a treasure for the first time.

"It's really beautiful... The life of people alone makes the night dazzling..."

Irisviel's murmur showed her emotion, to which Saber silently nodded. The political world she once lived in was now in a distant space-time from this place, but no emotion sprang from this scene she saw for the first time. Yet, the tranquility was only on the surface, as inside, her nerves were like a needle.

This place is already an enemy territory— this knowledge remained unchanged.

Saber is definitely not a Servant excelling in searching for the enemy, and depending on the situation, an enemy Servant would likely find her first if she was wandering about. It is hard to think that any enemy could pounce straightforwardly when everyone is looking, but still, right then, a well-timed surprise attack would not be weird.

Even so, without reproving Irisviel, she complied to her hope of fully enjoying herself freely for a brief time; the reason is her unwavering confidence in her sword.

She is the Heroic Spirit summoned as the strongest class of the Grail of Fuyuki, the position of swordsman. There is no Servant that surpasses her in close combat. She is certain that she can clear an escape route from the battlefield under any disadvantageous situation.

Actually, a surprise attack is what she desires. To withstand it fair and square, turn the table and go for the kill. If anyone is enough of a fool to plan on making her their enemy, she may remind them that the Saber class is not about gallantry.

"... Hey, Saber, do you want to see the beach next?"

As Irisviel was unable to hide her excitement, the young woman disguised as a man nodded with a smile. Her tension wasn't picking any opponent.

She had sworn she would protect Irisviel. So, she would protect her to the end as she was enjoying herself. That was the strength of her high pride as a knight.

There was a vast seaside park on the opposite shore of the big bridge that crossed the Mion River.

Late at night, two persons were strolling on the lone walkway with nobody around anymore. The north wind from the sea was blowing softly uninterrupted, blowing up Irisviel's long silver hair like the trail of a shooting star. In this place, couples dating hate the chill of winter nights and would only come in summer; but Irisviel, who was seeing the sea for the first time, didn't care about the cold as she had grown accustomed to it, back at her home place.

"We should have come here when it wasn't dark..."

Simply looking at the sea at night filling the bleak darkness, Saber said so in an apologetic tone. But Irisviel was unconcerned, concentrating on the horizon that had sunk in the dark.

"It's fine. The sea at night is beautiful too. It mirrors the night sky."

Listening to the endless roar of the waves, Irisviel's smile was all over her face.

As she had greatly enjoyed today's walk, her fair-skinned cheeks were flushed. She looked more like a young woman of tender years rather than a married woman with a child, with her innocent and naïve smile.

"I really had no idea— that walking through an unknown town as a couple with a gentleman would be such an enjoyable experience."

"Was my imitation of a gentleman satisfying?"

As Irisviel rejoiced, Saber banter with her with a sarcastic tone, unusual from the stubborn Heroic Spirit.

"Plentifully. It was faultless. Saber, today, you were a superb knight."

"You honor me, princess."

The young woman in the dark suit bowed courteously in front of her. Irisviel felt a little embarrassed, turning her head toward the sea.

"Saber, do you like the sea?"

"In my time, in my country... What was beyond the sea was always the enemy.

It was annoying and not very attractive."

"I see..."

At Saber's reply, Irisviel's expression becomes a little clouded.

"... It is tough to forgive. You are a woman like me.

For you who lived as King Arthur, dating gentlemen was not a suitable thing to enjoy."

"Well yes, that it was."

Saber shrugged her shoulders, smiling nonchalantly. She had no regret from casting aside her womanhood. Instead, her small chest was filled with the pride of leading through the battlefield.

"But you, Irisviel, would you not want to walk through the city with Kiritsugu rather than with me?"

This time, it was Irisviel's face that was crossed by a smile.

"He... Cannot do that. He would be pained with mixed feelings."

Not grasping the meaning of her reply, Saber makes a dubious face.

"Can Kiritsugu not enjoy his time spent with you?"

"Not that. He would certainly enjoy it as much as I do. ... That's why he can't. He is one for whom 'happiness' is a pain."

"..."

Carefully analyzing these words, Saber tries to comprehend the contradiction in the man named Emiya Kiritsugu.

"—He is a man who cannot value his happiness, is that the weakness he bears?"

"Maybe so. That man is always punishing himself deep inside. If he wants to keep chasing his dream, he has to be coldhearted."

With a distant gaze, Irisviel looks at the sea. Thinking of her husband who is hiding somewhere in the city, preparing for the same goal.

Saber reflected for a moment upon those words.

... Today, the discussion has moved on an unexpected topic after the sea. Even though they had intended the day to end on a pleasant mood.

Nonchalantly, Saber held and pulled Irisviel's upper arm. Just by this gesture, Irisviel settled down and exchanged a look with Saber.

"... An enemy Servant?"

"Yes."

The sensation didn't change. From undercover, a hundred meters on the side, he is leaving plain indications like a provocation. He is clearly conscious of Saber's presence, yet doesn't shorten the distance, rather slowly distancing himself—

"He seems to be inviting us."

"Hmm. That is honest. Does he want to choose the battlefield?"

Without a trace of tension in her voice, Irisviel still kept cool as she replied. In this battle situation, that is the proof of her complete faith in Saber. This made Saber revise her inner judgement in favor of her mistress.

"It appears the opponent has the same expectations as us. Making the opponent bite on the indications left for show... He is a Servant looking for a frontal fight, just like you, Saber, isn't he?"

"That would be a Lancer or a Rider class. He makes a straightforward opponent."

At Saber nodding, Irisviel again returns a fearless smile.

"Then, shall we take on the invitation?"

"I wish the same."

It is dangerous to blindly take the bait and follow the enemy to a field at his advantage. But Saber isn't the frail type to fear such tricks, and her mistress doesn't underestimate her Servant either.

The marks of the enemy were getting more distant, and Saber started walking with a quiet self-confidence. Irisviel, following likewise, turned on the switch of a palm-sized device hidden in her pocket. This is a "transmission machine" entrusted by Kiritsugu, a device for him to follow the position of Irisviel's group from a different route. It is a mechanized gadget that works without prana that Kiritsugu intentionally chose.

Irisviel trusted Saber's power. Any enemy of a rank lower than Saber that they would meet shall be killed in a blink of the eye with one sword strike by her proud Servant— that was the easy development she was expecting.

Yes, as much as possible... She wanted her knight to end the fight before Kiritsugu entered the battle.

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The broad bridge straddling the widening Mion River spans majestically over 665 meters, arching with a diameter of over three roads.

The top of the arch is over 50 meters high. Anyone standing so high and receiving the full force of the sea wind would miss a step and fall to his end into the river below, unable to go back up without great skills and a lifeline.

Atop that cold steel frame, Waver Velvet had nothing like a lifeline, clinging with only both arms and legs; thus of course he was giving up the dignity and composure he usually always had.

Right next to him, his Servant Rider is sitting cross-legged with his odious dignity.

"Ri, de, r, quick... Let's go down... Now!"

With his teeth continuously clicking from the cold and terror, Waver's complaining voice was like the blowing wind to the giant Servant.

"This place is perfect for a look-out. Well, this isn't the time for fancy sight-seeing in a high place."

With a wine bottle in his hand, sipping from time to time, he rambled while looking down at the west bank of the bridge, toward the wide seaside park hidden from the estuary. Waver can't see it, but what Rider was looking at— were the marks a Servant has been leaving around for 4 hours.

Rider had been wandering in the streets looking for a contact with the enemy, but he noticed that Servant only late in the afternoon.

While thinking whether he should rush down on him immediately, Rider has kept observing him from a distance without moving onward. When Waver asked about it, Rider answered with a snort.

"He's clearly luring us out. For him to not pick up on us, that's strange. And it's not just me anymore, other Servants must be studying his aspect.

An impatient Master would just get tired of waiting at some point, or something. That's what we should be looking forward to."

Rider's plan had no opening that Waver could see. Rather, it was unexpected. This broad-minded giant Servant could actually set up sly tactics.

Indeed, as Rider said, only a helpless fool would take the bait and accept the challenge. Those falling for it would only be eating each other and decrease the count. However self-confident a so provocative Servant is, anyone other than Rider going for a brawl would be good riddance. Whoever gets defeated, Rider can smash the winner. There is definitely a profit in the fight of others.

So, after it is decided so, it becomes a matter of endurance. Remaining at a fixed distance from the traces of the Servant wandering aimlessly in the city, Waver and Rider followed and were still surveying.

Nonetheless— there are obvious reasons behind taking a high point of view, but there are limits. Never mind Servants, Waver with his flesh and blood body would definitely die if he falls. It shouldn't be possible to ignore that, so how come this giant cares so little about Waver's safety?

"Co, come down! No, get the hell down! I, I've, I've had it!"

"Ah, just wait. You're a restless guy. Sitting and waiting is also part of the battle."

Sipping in his wine bottle, Rider didn't even look at Waver's half crying face when answering so gratuitously. "High places are dangerous", such common sense hasn't been acknowledged for yet between the two.

"If you're bored, read the book I entrusted to you. It's a good book."

Hearing that, Waver remembered about the stupid weight in the knapsack hanging on his shoulder. In this situation where they shouldn't afford even one unnecessary gram, the poetry anthology with its thick hard cover really is a dead weight.

That was the one book Rider looted from the library he raided right when he arrived in the present world. The 'Iliad' written by the poet Homer in ancient Greece— the epic poem describing the Trojan war, in which fought gods and humans jumbled together.

The atlas can be okay. Exaggerating about world conquest, Rider takes interest in the geography of the modern world, even if it sounds foolish.

But what's with a poetry anthology? Rider set up a library at home even though he was preparing for war, and yet he still insisted in bringing the Iliad with him. Naturally, if he wants to bring anything that isn't his regular equipment, he would need to remain materialized; if he needs to dematerialize to hide from the other people, then after all, it's Waver who ends up having to carry the luggage.

Certainly, Rider insisted that the book was "preparation for war". But how on Earth can a book that isn't even about war strategy be helpful on the battlefield?

"Rider... Why, did you, bring this book?"

At Waver's bitter question, the Heroic Spirit answered with a grave expression.

"The Iliad is very profound. At the height of battle, I would suddenly get the urge to read a verse of poetry. At a time like that, I feel bad when I can't reread something immediately."

"..."

He feels like his interlocutor just gave him a bullshit answer, but fear stops him from arguing back.

"At a time like that, you mean... In battle?"

"Yes."

Rider nods nonchalantly as if his reply was perfectly normal.

"... But how?"

"With my left hand, when I hold my sword in my right hand. If I need to hold the bridle with my left hand, I get a page to read it aloud."

"..."

Waver felt at loss for words at the unimaginable answer.

"It isn't that surprising. The warriors of my era all lived a life of battle. Battling while drinking and eating, embracing women while battling, battling even while sleeping. Anyone can do that."

Just ask him and he won't stop. This man does seem like he could do all that, but...

"You're kidding, right?"

"Of course. You fool."

He sniggered and gave an exploding flinch on Waver's forehead.

"Gyaa---h!!"

He didn't have the time to worry, let alone dodge. At any rate, there he was, clinging on the steel frame with all his might with both arms and legs. Waver couldn't even rub his pained forehead, as he could only howl with an unbecoming shriek.

"Hey, kid, anyone would laugh at a joke like that. When your face turns blue like that, it's because you have no guts."

Ignoring Rider's frank laugh, the magus strongly regretted choosing this Heroic Spirit as he shed tears from the pain on his forehead.

"I wanna go back... Go back to England..."

"I told you not to rush like that. Here, things are moving up at last."

"... Eh?"

Rider points at the seaside park with a stern chin.

"Even I, the King of Conquerors, noticed only just now, but— yes, it seems there was one more Servant in this park. This guy isn't hiding anything either. On the contrary, he's nearing the other one who arrived after us."

"Then, then—"

"The two seem to be going toward the port. That's a provocation. That's it— We'll study their fight."

Before one knows, his eyes start to hold the sharp gleam of a beast as he gave a threatening laugh. He was yet only a spectator, but the soul of the Heroic Spirit Alexander was already on the battlefield.

In Waver's heart, unable to move on the steel frame, Waver's misery was winning over the sense of reliability he should have from Rider. —Moreover, he was mostly thinking that nothing mattered if he were to fall down anyway.

The west bank of the seaside park is prolonged by a row of boring storehouses. The block, which contains harbor facilities, also plays the role of a wall that separates the eastern industrial area from Shinto. At night, the pedestrian traffic ceases, and the streetlights shine uselessly on the asphalt, but it makes the scenery even more empty. Unmanned derrick cranes were turned toward the dark sea, like an eerie flock of huge fossilized dinosaurs.

Indeed, this is a suitable place for Servants who must confront hidden from public view.

Saber and Irisviel walked up, magnificent as duelists going to the place of agreement, on the four-lane road for the large vehicles that are meant to drive on it. The enemy as well was already showing himself, without running or hiding. The tall shadow standing in the middle of the empty street emits an extraordinary amount of prana even more outrageous than his odd outfit, clearly showing that he was much more than human.

The two Servants stop, facing each other from about 10 meters apart.

Finally, they met the first Servant. Saber carefully observed the enemy she will be battling to death with.

He was a handsome man, with quirky long hair combed roughly backward. He charmed the eyes pretty well on the first glance. His main pole, over two meters and taller than himself, is obviously his weapon. Amongst the seven classes, he is one of the three “knight” classes— Saber, Archer, and with them, the Heroic Spirit of the lance. Undoubtedly, he is the Servant Lancer.

The strange thing is that he does not have just that one long spear.

Along with the spear Lancer was holding loose in his right hand, the head resting on his shoulder, he was also carrying in his left hand a shorter spear that was one third the length of the right one.

To handle a spear with ease, the obvious stance is of course to hold one with both hands. Whatever you can do with swords, one can't imagine that holding two spears is common.

The two spears are tightly wrapped from the handle to the tip with a cloth that looks like an amulet, hiding the shaft. This is probably a countermeasure to avoid revealing the true name of the Noble Phantasm.

"How nice of you to come. All of those who were parading around today in the town have only cowered away. ... You are the only one of valor who answered my invitation."

With a humble, cheerful praising voice, the man— the Heroic Spirit Lancer asked Saber carelessly, without standing on guard.

"That pure fighting spirit... Am I correct in thinking you are Saber?"

"You are. Surely you must be Lancer?"

"Indeed. —Hm, it is unusual to exchange names with the opponent in a deadly fight. That was a pleasure that is not obligatory."

In agreement, Saber loosens her feigned impudence a little.

"Certainly, it isn't. Our battle isn't one for honor to begin with. You yourself are raising your spear for your master of this era, are you not?"

"Fuh, correct."

With a strange expression, Lancer answered in a cool, bitter tone, not reminding of someone who wished a deadly exchange. Looking more closely, he is a remarkably handsome and beautiful man.

His intrepid features are a high bridge of the nose and a valiant eyebrow. Despite his hard-cut mouth denoting a stoic air, his eyes seemed to hide a quiet grief, yet a strong, manly scent rises from him. Below his left eye, he has a beauty spot like a grain of tear. That gives his gaze an even more impressive brilliance.

Truly, his features were those that could sweep a woman's heart at a glance. —No, actually, does his elegant air of beauty only come from his features?

Holding back behind Saber, Irisviel shortened her breathing a little as she frowned.

"... A charm magecraft. It is impolite to use on a married woman, spearman."

Clearly, Lancer was emitting a spiritual power that could marvel a woman. As Irisviel's body is a homunculus, it is specialized in the usage of magecraft, and her magic resistance is higher than normal, but an average woman would be enslaved by this man at a glance.

Lancer shrugged with a bitter smile at Irisviel's remark.

"Sorry, that's some sort of a curse I've had since I was born. This is all you will get. Blame my birth, or your womanhood."

An example of a charm curse is a "Mystic Eye", but the only one Lancer has been looking straight at since the beginning is Saber, he hasn't looked at Irisviel behind her. The charm probably activated as soon as Irisviel looked at his face. That would make it a "Mystic Face" instead of a Mystic Eye.

Chuckling, Saber observed Lancer.

"You were not expecting my sword to grow dull with that fine look, were you, spear user?"

"That would be such a killjoy, but indeed, the anti-magic ability of the Saber class is not vain. ... Excellent. It wouldn't suit my reputation to murder a woman weakened by my only face. I am glad my first opponent has such backbone."

"Hoh, you were wishing for a fair fight. It is my honor to face such a proud Heroic Spirit."

Exaggerating, Saber replied with a quiet smile. It was a smile that is only for those who wish for a perfectly straightforward life-and-death exchange.

"Then— Anytime."

Picking up the long spear on his right shoulder by spinning it once, Lancer raised the tip of the short spear in his left hand. His stance, spreading both spears like wings, really was an unreadable style.

Saber's fighting spirit boiled as well and exploded. The prana surge enveloped the girl's slender dark suit in a swirl like a tornado— and the next instant, her body was wrapped in a silver and azure armor. The armor and

gauntlets created as by magic was the true form of the beautiful King of Knights, as a Heroic Spirit.

"Saber..."

Swallowing nervously, Irisviel called from behind. She could feel the fighting spirit released by both Servants, as well as the atmosphere strained by that tension. —There was no room to disrupt this battle.

And yet, she couldn't just stand and watch. She was only a substitute Master for Saber.

"... Take care. I can support you with healing magecraft, but no more..."

Without a word, Saber nodded.

"Leave Lancer to me. But it worries me that the enemy Master is nowhere to be seen."

As Saber said, just remaining invisible, Lancer's Master was a danger. Usually, a Master would stand by the Servant and instruct him as the battle develops, as well as providing magical support. As long as Lancer's Master doesn't have full faith in him, he has to be lurking nearby to watch over Lancer's battle.

"He might be preparing an odd trick. Please be cautious. —Irisviel, I entrust you to watch my back."

Her jade eyes spoke calmly. Fearlessly.

Trust the Heroic Spirit of the sword.

As the one this Heroic Spirit recognized as her master, trust yourself likewise, Irisviel. —Said her eyes.

"... Understood. Saber, bring me victory."

"Yes. I will."

Nodding resolutely, Saber takes a step forward.

Toward the space of the long spear, where Lancer was standing on guard...

-154:09:25

After receiving the signal sent by Irisviel, Emiya Kiritsugu and Hisau Maiya raced towards the factories according to its direction. They were welcomed by a soundless stretch of silence.

There was only the howling of the sea wind by their ears, and an atmosphere as quiet and stagnant as death. The night was so serene.

However —

“…It has already begun.”

Just by the traces of prana from the surroundings, Kiritsugu was able to accurately judge the situation.

Someone had formed a barrier. It should be the work of the enemy Servant’s Master. The goal was to segregate ordinary humans from the Heaven’s Feel, concealing the true battlefield of the war. It is a compulsory rule for magi to prevent their activities from being exposed to other mortals.

Kiritsugu began to contemplate as he held the ten-or-so kilograms heavy sniper rifle. He had already estimated Irisviel’s position according to the transmitter. However, questions remain as to how to approach the location, and where to observe once they reach it.

He did not think about joining the battle at all; that was why he brought the sniper rifle along. He wanted to inspect the battle at a suitable place, attacking with the rifle only when needed. Servants are not humans, thus only a Servant can wound another Servant. No matter how powerful Kiritsugu and Maiya’s firearms are they would not work on Servants. It was Saber’s job to battle the opposing Servant. As long as the enemy can devote himself to the battle and does not pay attention to the well-being of his Master, then it is possible to win this fight.

“Up there, that looks like that’s a good place to observe the fight.”

Maiya pointed in front of them as she spoke. It is a derrick crane that towered high into the night. Judging by sight, the control cabin hovered about 30 meters above the ground; it would be the best observation point possible if one can contrive to silently climb up there.

Kiritsugu had no objections to Maiya's suggestion, but because of that, he shook his head.

"Yes, that is the ideal place to survey the battle. So, it shouldn't be only us that came up with the idea."

"…"

Without further explanations on Kiritsugu's part, Maiya had already understood his intentions.

"Maiya, slip in through the eastern bank, I'll go through the west… Find an observation point that can overlook both Saber's battle and the crane."

"I understand."

Maiya disappeared in the shadows of the factories with a jog, holding the AUG assault gun in her hands. Kiristugu checked the input from the transmitter as he cautiously moved in the opposite direction.

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All Irisviel could do was to stare at the battle in front of her in astonishment.

This battle in front of her was proceeding with extraordinary intensity.

She knew it to be a merciless duel that could only have taken place in that remote era.

Warriors clad in armor, in single combat battling with all the strength in their bodies amid the light reflecting off sword and spear and the shadow of swinging blades.

But the amount of escaping prana and the intense heat were different.

If it was merely a clash between cold steel, what would be the mighty torrent of air that accompanied it and threatened to destroy all within sight?

The foot that landed crushed the ground.

The wind that followed the swinging of weapons crudely severed the lamp post in half.

Irisviel could no longer see the movements carried out at such high speeds. She was only feeling the aftershock of the conflict between the two.

The peeling sheet iron on the outer walls of the warehouses was ripped away by the wind from Irisviel's side as if it was a piece of coiled tin foil. She could not comprehend how the iron can be torn away. Perhaps it was Saber's sword or Lancer's spear that brushed against its adjacent hollow space. Apart from that, she could not come up with any other explanation.

The wind was moaning.

Faced with a dimension that is completely at odds with the physical laws of this world, the air emitted paranoid wails.

A chaotic storm raged on the empty shopping street, destroying, trampling all things within.

Just hand-to-hand combat between the two would be enough to ruin an entire street.

Heaven's Feel —

Irisviel was experiencing the awe and wonder told only in stories. The world where myths and legends dwelled came alive vividly before her eyes.

This could be the legends reborn.

Shafts of thunder tore the sky apart; knolls of roaring waves shattered the earth. The imaginary realm was miraculously materialized with astonishing clarity.

This is… the war between Servants…

Faced with a world that she had hitherto not thought possible, all Irisviel could do was stare as if transfixed.

At the same time, Saber was experiencing a similar wonder.

Slaughter at war was truly a piece of cake for her. As a knight that braved her life through countless battles, she fought with her enemies as smoothly as she would yield a knife and a fork.

In her comprehension a ‘spear’ should be a weapon that is wielded with both hands. It is common knowledge.

So, she thought that for Lancer, using two spears is just a means to confuse the enemy.

As the Heroic Spirit of the Lance, the spear in his hands should be his Noble Phantasm. Whereas, revealing the true name of the Noble Phantasm in the Heaven’s Feel equates to exposing one’s true identity.

Therefore, the amulets bound onto Lancer’s spears must be for the purpose of concealing the spear’s real name. Looks like his Master and him were very prudent on the matter of hiding identities.

If that was the case, it would not be hard to explain why he was using two spears.

Because Saber does not know which spear is the true Noble Phantasm, she had to fend off the attacks made by both of them.

Even so, the long spear on the right, the short spear on the left — one of them must be Lancer's 'true weapon.'

Between one’s habitual weapon and the weapon used to dazzle the enemy, ‘feint' and ‘solid’ moves can be distinguished. So, Saber paid close attention to each of his attacks. She believed that if she can recognize the true lance, her chances of winning would be improved immensely.

Yet —

Her own attack was deflected for the third time. Saber had to step back to wait for a better opportunity.

“What’s wrong, Saber? Your attacks are not really working.”

“…”

She could not argue back to Lancer’s taunts. After about thirty exchanges, she still had not managed to hit her opponent even once.

Lancer swung the lance in his right hand and approached her in a straight run. The swinging shaft covered a wide area, its strength and speed equal to what would be achieved with both hands. No, precisely because it was used with one hand, there were many moves not capable when a spear is used conventionally with two hands. The lance was thrust towards Saber from an unexpected angle.

Nevertheless, a lance has its own limitations. Because of its extended length, a gap would inevitably show up between two attacks. During that time, the shorter spear from the left can follow in and continue to hassle Saber.

Saber’s attack just then was broken by the short spear’s immaculate defense.

Simultaneously using two lances yet making no feint moves. This Heroic Spirit, Lancer, merged the lances in his left and right hands in a seamless choreography. Just what kind of devotion and practice was needed to obtain such a strong fighting style?

… This man is good!

Saber was still quivering with having a strong opponent in her first battle until then. But now Saber had suddenly escaped from that shadow of fear.

Despite that, according to observers, Lancer would appear to have an advantage with his incessant attacks, the truth was not so.

Lancer was as good as exhausted from fending off Saber’s attacks since they first engaged. Despite his taunts he was also powerless to change the situation.

For Lancer, who is capable of using his lance with just one hand, dual-wielding two spears, long and short, at the same time would enable him to attack both long-range and close-range. Taking account of the supremacy in weaponry, he should not have been forced into his current predicament by Saber and her single sword.

However —

How did the sword…

Lancer complained silently in his heart. It was not only the observing Irisviel that could not see the movement of the high-speed sword. Even Lancer, a Servant himself, could not discern the trajectory of the sword in Saber’s hands.

Lancer had no way of knowing. This too is one of Heroic Spirit Artoria's Noble Phantasms, the threat of Invisible Air • Barrier of the Wind King.

The air surrounding the sword was compacted together with immense amounts of prana, creating impossible refractions of light, rendering the sword invisible. Although it is not too much a support for the Noble Phantasm, its result was however very obvious in melee combat.

Saber’s opponent is attacked with an invisible sword, and the countering attack is similarly blocked by an invisible sword. Lancer’s worry was understandable. Even though he could decipher Saber’s attacks by her movement, he could not make surprise attacks on her due to the inability to see the length of her blade.

Therefore, Lancer can only approximate things and keep himself outside of Saber’s range. Also, only then can his magnificent continuous attacks be used to their full extent. Despite him being able to block all of Saber’s attacks, he had yet to find an opportunity to deal her a lethal blow.

This woman is quite good…!

Facing the enemy that he had just met, knowing the time had come for him fight with his life, a sad smile emerged on Lancer’s face.

The two Heroic Spirits devoted their entire selves to the fight, sparing no thoughts to the world surrounding them.

No, even if they had stayed on guard, in their current state they might still be oblivious to the fact that someone was slipping into the terrain…

The reason was that, not only is the newcomer a considerable distance from the sparks flying off the deadly dance of blade and spear, he moved soundlessly in the shadows, and also had the ability of "Presence Concealment" that can bypass a Servant’s detection.

A gust of wind from the sea fluttered the black robe; the sliver of a satisfactory smile emerged on the countenance beneath the white skull mask.

No one could have thought that the Servant "Assassin," eliminated in front of many witnesses last night, now stood in the evening shopping street.

Assassin hid in the perfect spot to observe the straightforward battle — the crane that loomed beside the cliff. The location was about 500 meters away from the site of the skirmish. As a Servant with eyesight surpassing that of a human he could clearly discern the two’s conflict, even spotting their

expressions with accuracy. Meanwhile, the two combatants barely had time to consider if they were being spied upon.

He could have remained in spiritual form and obtain information from a much closer distance. But while he is in spiritual form, his senses would have turned into spiritual detection; and the job that his Master gave him tonight was to ‘observe with your eyes.'

Assassin, who understood his master’s intentions, silently gazed at the battle in the distance according to his order.

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Fifteen kilometers away from the warehouse area where the deadly struggle continued.

Someone was sitting in the darkness within the basement of the Fuyuki Church, encased by the silence of the night.

While his eyes were closed, he was not resting but sitting in silence with his nerves on edge. The jet-black figure was Kotomine Kirei's priest's frock.

From his profile, one might think that he was contemplating about certain matters. Who would have thought that he was listening to the crooning of the sea breeze, and seeing before his eyes a battle scene full of the sparks from the clashing of steel?

What he was seeing, and hearing was an unknown battle between Servants taking place in the distant warehouses… the contents identical to those seen by his Servant Assassin.

He was using the result of his past three years of study. An ability called Shared Perception that was taught to him by Tōsaka Tokiomi.

Using only a prana connection, he was able to share senses with the one that made a contract with him. In the Heaven's Feel, the ability to completely monitor a Servant's actions from long-distance is very useful. If one's Servant is Assassin, who is especially skilled in reconnaissance, then the ability is peerless.

The only difficulty lies in that if the contractor does not agree to it, the ability cannot be used. For Tokiomi, who taught this magecraft to Kirei

himself, his suggestions were immediately rejected by Archer. For the haughty King of Heroes, even if it were his Master, to allow another to look through his eyes seems highly unlikely.

Therefore, the only ones who can achieve this are Kirei and Assassin.

“— Something is happening around the warehouses beside the estuary of the Mion River. It appears that the initial battle has begun.”

Kirei spoke, but there is no one in the darkness. Instead, there was an aged phonograph upon a table, its brass horn tilted towards Kirei. As was expected, the ordinary antique phonograph replied to his words in a human voice.

“Not the initial; officially, it is the 'second' battle, Kirei.”

Although the sound was rather distorted, the unconstrained tone filled with composure could only be the voice of Tōsaka Tokiomi.

A closer inspection of this antiquity showed that, while it could be mistaken for a phonograph with an old-style bell-type horn, beneath the apparatus there was neither a turntable nor stylus. In its place, the end of the horn was connected to a large jewel with a metal wire.

This contraption is a prana conductor that is passed down in the Tōsaka family, and which Tokiomi lent to Kirei. A similar prana conductor was placed in the workshop of the Tōsaka residence. It appears that Tokiomi was also currently sitting in front of the device. Through sympathetic vibration the jewels on the two contraptions can pass to each other the vibrations of the air inside their horns. This is the Tōsaka family using the ‘communication device’ of their jewel magecraft.

As soon as the Church of Fuyuki was put into Father Kotomine Risei’s hands, Tokiomi had placed the jewel communicator into the church. Father Risei was Tokiomi’s secret supporter, while his son Kotomine Kirei was sent into the Church for protection in the beginning of the Heaven’s Feel as the first person to be defeated. Logically, Tokiomi’s goal was to communicate discreetly with these two people.

Everything appeared to be completely normal on the outside; no one would think that Kirei could manage to contact the outside world. At the same time Kirei, who was not a magus, also thought that rather than using this strange machine, radios might just as well do the trick.

But the difference between radios and Tōsaka’s jewel communicator is that conversations on the latter cannot be eavesdropped. Upon consideration, Tokiomi’s prudent behavior was actually more beneficial for Kirei.

No matter what, right now Assassin and Kirei have replaced Archer as Tokiomi’s scouts. Kirei used his own eyes to see what Assassin sees, and also employed the clairvoyance that came with being a Master to capture every minute detail.

“It... appears to be a battle between Saber and Lancer. The level of Saber's abilities is extremely high, mostly likely with the majority of parameters near A rank.”

“… I see. No wonder it is the strongest class. Can you see the Master?”

“I can only see one more person… a silver-haired woman standing behind Saber.”

“Hm… seems that Lancer’s Master knows he should conceal himself. Not an amateur; he understands the rule of this Heaven’s Feel… Wait, did you say Saber’s Master is a silver-haired woman?”

“Yes. A young Caucasian girl. Silver-haired with red eyes; doesn’t look quite human.”

The other side of the brass horn seemed to be silently contemplating.

“… An Einzbern homunculus? Could it be that they are still making homunculi Masters… though it is not impossible…”?

“Are you saying, this woman is the Master of the Einzberns?”

“So Jubstacheit’s pawns are not just limited to Emiya Kiritsugu… It’s hard to believe that I actually predicted it wrong.”

For the first time in his life a curious agitation surged up in Kirei’s chest; within moments he realized that it was actually the emotion named disappointment.

“All in all, that woman is the key to grasping the flow of the Heaven's Feel. Kirei, you must pay close attention.”

“… I understand. I’ll send someone to follow her at all times.”

Immediately after receiving those mysterious words, Kirei continued to watch the two Heroic Spirits intently.

But be it the sparkling collision of blades or the leaping prana bursts, in Kirei’s eyes they were no longer as bright as they seemed moments ago.

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Kiritsugu silently set up the Walther on the mountainous shipping containers piled on the container port beside the seaside cliffs. He took in the situation of the fight using the electronic sights that penetrated the cover of night.

Firstly, the thermographic scope… he spotted it. On the screen that displayed cool shades of black and blue, red and orange images emerged conspicuously. The heat diagram representing the two of them fused together, as if it was a giant flare.

Further in the distance two smaller heat patterns appeared. One of them was standing in the middle of the street witnessing this battle — the other was concealed on the warehouse roofs of a remoter locale.

It was very easy to decide which one of them was to be the target of assassination.

It was indeed Irisviel who stood on the road. She was almost stating that, as the partner of an excellent Saber, she should not hide away but fight a fair battle bravely and in the open. Then the heat signature on the roof would be the enemy Master… the one controlling Lancer, who was facing Kiritsugu's Saber with dual spears.

Submerged in the darkness, Kiritsugu donned a coldhearted smile. It was the best starting condition he could hope for. Lancer's Master probably relied on illusions or such presence-concealing magecraft to hide his position and thought it enough; he did not consider that this would be countered with mechanical cameras. Like all other magi who died by Kiritsugu’s hand, he would walk the same road as them to his destruction.

Kiritsugu contacted Maiya, positioned on the other side of the battlefield, with his radio.

“Maiya, Lancer’s Master is hiding on top of the warehouses, northeast to where Saber is. Can you see him?”

“… No. From my position it’s a blind spot.”

If possible, Kiritsugu wanted to cooperate with Maiya to ensure the accuracy of the attack with a crossfire. Unfortunately, only Kiritsugu himself can fire at the moment. But it would not be a problem as it was a distance of barely three hundred meters. Kiritsugu's skills would have taken his target's life with just one bullet. As long as he remains unaware of the presence of the sniper, no magus can defend himself from a .300 Winchester Magnum round.

Setting up the bipod, Kiritsugu had just started to get into the mood — Suddenly, with a start, he turned the Walther towards the derrick crane.

In that moment he felt that all his plans were ruined.

Keeping his disapproval inside his heart, he whispered into the radio again.

"Maiya, up on the crane…"

"… Yes, affirmative here as well; it's just like what you thought."

It seems that the figure seen by Kiritsugu through the night vision scope was captured in the scope of Maiya's AUG assault rifle as well.

Meanwhile, the third party that was scrutinizing the battle between Saber and Lancer also discovered the silhouette atop the crane.

It was a completely unpredicted event. In the Holy Grail War, one would logically rather stay on the sidelines than to eagerly join in the battle. A clever Master would not step in even if other Servants jump into the fray but would choose to keep on observing a fight. Picking on the aftermath of a conflict would also be quite a good idea. Even if one is not that fortunate, it would at least get one to know about the enemy's conditions.

Kiritsugu, who arrived first at the battle scene, never thought that this fight would have only one team of observers. He had therefore given up the best position on the crane and chose a place that can pay attention to both it and the battlefield. The newcomer appeared to be oblivious to the fact that his location was already under surveillance and occupied the ideal spot to observe the fight. Consequentially, he was exposed to Kiritsugu's line of sight.

However, one important factor escaped his calculations.

Kiritsugu once again gazed upon the pale green shape within the scope. It was an observer that he had never seen before… Completely covered by a pure black robe, a skull mask over his face. Though hard to believe, it is

definitely Assassin, the one who was annihilated last night at the Tōsaka residence.

Kiritsugu, who wasn't satisfied by the images recorded by Maiya's familiars, was not entirely surprised by the reappearance of the supposedly dead Assassin. The problem, putting aside the strangeness of the situation, was that the one currently on top of the derrick crane is a Servant.

If Kiritsugu sniped Lancer's Master now, the opponent would be dead instantly, but at the same time it would also expose the shooter’s location. Although Assassin is not a class with decisive combat strength, he is nevertheless a supernatural being, a Servant. As a magus Kiritsugu would never manage to win in such a fight.

He could not expect Saber to help him. In regard to the distance between Saber and he, Assassin was far closer to him. Besides, Saber was not even aware that Kiritsugu was at the scene; he cannot hope for her to come to his aid.

Saber was also devoted to the battle with Lancer. Even though a Servant would lose his prana supply when his Master is killed, the Servant can still remain materialized in this plane with his own strength. Defeating Lancer’s Master does not mean that he had defeated Lancer.

There was only one thing left — the Command Seals.

The authority of the Command Seals is not limited to the scope of the powers of the Servant. When the Servant agrees with the master’s order without resistance, the Command Seal can have effects outside of the Servant's potential and accomplish a miracle. It would not be impossible to instantly transport Saber to Kiritsugu's location to hold off Assassin. But that would leave the defenseless Irisviel directly in front of Lancer.

— Kiritsugu thought, incessantly, combining many elements and finally came to a conclusion. Although it was the ideal opportunity to finish off Lancer’s Master, it would have to pass for the night.

Since that was decided, it would not do to have doubts on anything else.

“Maiya, you keep an eye on Assassin, I’ll observe Lancer.”

“Understood.”

Kiritsugu sighed soundlessly, lowered the bipod of the Walther, and continued to calmly observe the scene within the scope.

Since he had decided to abandon this opportunity, Saber’s effort tonight was as good as wasted. If she could restrain from showing her Noble Phantasm, or to escape immediately with Irisviel, then he would have to extend his thanks to her — But she was a haughty and proud Heroic Spirit, and those possibilities were only his conjectures.

However, it would not be a bad idea to see just once how capable his subordinate actually is.

“… That will depend on you, my lovely King of Knights".

-154:03:11

The confrontation between Saber and Lancer was still more like a competition.

Rather, as each was measuring the other's power thoroughly in a preliminary test, it had started to look like a display of strength.

Of course, even for a test, it's Servants we are talking about. The avenue was a miserable wreck from the scars carved in as a result. Two storehouses had already collapsed, and a hundred square meters of asphalt were torn up. Turned into a battlefield, it was almost as if an earthquake has just come and gone.

In the middle of that disaster, still without a single scratch, Saber and Lancer are glaring at each other, preparing their next move. Neither showed any sign of exhaustion.

"There's no honor in battling unannounced, but—"

Lancer starts speaking with Saber, a killing intent flowing into the tip of both of his spears, only his gaze keeping its freshness.

Lancer starts speaking with Saber, a killing intent flowing into the tip of both of his spears, only his gaze keeping its freshness. "Anyhow, I give you credit. Coming so far without a sweat, you're one heck of a woman."

"Anyhow, I give you credit. Coming so far without a sweat, you're one heck of a woman."

"That's unnecessary modesty, Lancer."

Holding her invisible sword, Saber put a smile on her lips once more.

"Although I do not know your name, your spear play and your compliments... You honor me. I am thankful of that."

Neither knew the other's history, with no connection, from a different country, but the heart of the two of them surely was connected.

Both had pride in their trained skills and strength, and meeting an equal opponent, they freely pay respect to each other— They both have the pride of a warrior hidden in their heart, the two Heroic Spirits understood that much.

But—

"'Enough of this playtime, Lancer.'"

Both Saber and Irisviel are surprised by the cold voice resounding out of nowhere.

"Lancer's... Master!?"

Stiffening, Irisviel took a look around her, but there was no human form to be seen. With the unnatural echo of the voice, she couldn't make out whether it was a man's or a woman's, or where it came from. Perhaps there was a camouflage like an illusion. The enemy doesn't seem to be close to showing up in front of Irisviel anytime.

"'Don't drag the fight anymore. This Saber is a formidable enemy. Make it quick. —You may unveil your Noble Phantasm.'"

Saber's face stiffens at the words of the unseen magus.

Noble Phantasm— He is urging his Servant to bare his fangs seriously.

"Understood, my master."

Contrary to what he had showed of his character up to now, Lancer dropped his voice quietly, and changed his weapons grip.

Without hesitation, he dropped the short spear in his left hand at his feet.

“Then... Is it that long spear!?”

In front of Saber, Lancer peeled off the amulet tightly bound around the long spear in his right hand.

It was a deep crimson spear. Totally different from before, prana starts rising from the tip of the spear like an ominous mirage.

"—That's about it. From here on, I'm out to do you in."

Lancer muttered with a low voice, changing his stance to hold with both hands his lethal weapon finally exposed.

Saber as well lowered her sword, measuring the distance between her and Lancer with greater caution.

Exposing one's Noble Phantasm can have two different kinds of effects.

One type is the demonstration of the large power of one's deadliest move as they announce its true name. Take Saber's ultimate secret move. She has "Excalibur • the Sword of Promised Victory" currently protected behind a bounded field of invisibility, but if she throws away the camouflage and shouts its true name, her sacred sword would shoot a stream of light that can mow down a thousand soldiers. As it truly is an anti-fortress Noble Phantasm that can turn the ground into scorched earth, it cannot be used just like that but as a last step.

Along with that, there can also be how the weapon already carries the nature of a Noble Phantasm. In Saber's case, her "Invisible Air • Barrier of the Wind King" is an example. That alone doesn't have the capacity to annihilate the enemy; it is more a Noble Phantasm suitable in battle as a "sharp tool". It isn't particularly used for strength, but to put it differently it is easier to use, and a trump card that can bring victory if used well.

And so, Lancer's red spear is—

Probably, the latter. So said Saber's intuition. Lancer will keep exchanging continuous blows with Saber. She doesn't suspect the next strike to be decisive for the fight.

"..."

The two closed the distance by sliding their feet, silently but with the tension doubling.

—Lancer made the first move.

Compared to the acrobatic freedom of his spear up to now, this was a much simpler stab in a straight line. A stabbing thrust that was guessing the length of Saber's blade hidden under Invisible Air, or rather, renouncing to watch out for it.

As a natural reaction, Saber repelled Lancer's spear with the arm that held the sword, ignoring the pain. Really, that was neither too serious nor sharp, just a common strike. But...

The disaster came like a squall.

Between the entangled spear and sword, an abrupt, unexpected gale rolled in and blew around.

"Wha!?"

Letting out a shocked voice, Saber took three steps away from Lancer's spear. Lancer calmly resumed his stance without chasing her. Watching over the scene, Irisviel can't understand just what is happening.

The gust of wind just now lasted only an instant, but it wasn't particularly gushing out prana. The origin of that wind was an enigma, but that definitely wasn't a threat from Lancer.

Nevertheless, Saber was the only one who was shocked. Lancer is smiling boldly at her astonishment.

"I exposed it. Your precious sword."

"..."

Silent, Saber didn't comprehend Lancer's victorious mutter. They both understand the reason behind this mysterious phenomenon.

The wind had come from Saber's sword. ... More specifically, that was Invisible Air's doing.

The bounded field of condensed pressure that could refract light had leaked out in just an instant. The instant it had clashed with Lancer's spear— the prana controlling the wind around the sword had become loose.

And at that moment, Lancer had caught a glimpse of the shape of the "true sword" inside the torn bounded field. Lancer's murmur from before was the proof that it was definitely his spear that had exposed Invisible Air.

"I got the length of your blade. You won't get me with that invisible interval again."

Whether it was exaggeration or not, Lancer started flinging thrusts.

Just as he had said, the spear strikes suddenly gained in vigor, the attacks more severe and not vain anymore. Having certified the distance Saber's blade could go, he made no mistake in his aiming. Letting just one thrust pass meant a fatal wound— understanding that much, Saber kept moving her body and parried every single spear strike with her blade.

Flickering, there showed the afterimage of *the shape of her golden sword*.

'Kh...'

There was still pressure coming out of Invisible Air, but it was a continuous, random gale violently blowing Saber's blond hair in waves. There was no doubt left. Lancer's red spear is draining Invisible Air. Each time it comes with the tip of the spear, the golden blade is showing like a stroboscope.

'But... With that spear...'

There's still a way— Saber encouraged herself. Using a spear with both hands, that is a style Saber can deal with.

In the middle of the uninterrupted series of strikes, Saber looked for just one attack with a weak aiming. With just that, she can twist her body instead of parrying and rely on the hardness of her armor. A well-placed counter in a near-death situation can be a perfect opportunity.

In a swift movement, Saber struck at Lancer's shoulder. She ignored the tip of the red spear grazing her flank. It should be superficial on her armor, and meanwhile, she will be splitting her enemy from the shoulder—

Saber foresaw the pain, her intuition saving her from a lost cause.

Her sword dropping in mid-air, Saber turned over and threw herself on the side. It was hard to say if it had been a close call. Lancer's howling spear definitely seemed to have spilled blood.

There's no need to say whose blood it is.

Rolling on the ground, Saber escaped from Lancer pursuing her, and stood up immediately to keep track of her opponent. Her eyes betrayed her pain.

"Saber!"

Seeing that something had happened, Irisviel started sending out prana to heal Saber's flank.

"—Thank you, Irisviel, I'm fine, the healing is working."

Even saying so, Saber is still holding her side, as if there were still traces of pain left.

"It does seem like victory will not be gained that easily..."

Muttering, Lancer didn't seem too discouraged, and rather spoke with an amused voice.

Visibly, this man greatly enjoyed competing against a formidable enemy.

Grinding her teeth, Saber calmly assembled the puzzle in her mind, and the series of hardly believable circumstances pieced themselves together.

Her armor should have blocked Lancer's spear. Nevertheless, the tip of the spear had Saber's blood on it.

And— right now, Saber's armor is the same as ever, without a scratch.

To make a practical guess, just with the spear coming in contact, the blade passed through the armor as if it had vanished.

Saber cannot dematerialize, but she can materialize her battle outfit and then cancel it. In other words, Saber's armor is knit out of prana, and it is not material in the present reality like the clothes Irisviel bought.

Furthermore, it was incomprehensible that Invisible Air could be cracked... The contact with Lancer's spear had created a fissure in the bounded field that generated the wind.

"... I see. I figured out the mystery of your spear, Lancer."

Saber murmured with a low voice. She reflected once more upon the toughness of her formidable enemy.

That red spear can cut off prana.

Nevertheless, it's not so powerful that it could break or cancel the source of the magecraft. Saber's armor is still fine, and Invisible Air is still functioning correctly. The spear is effective only the instant it hits the blade.

Apparently, at that instant, it cuts off the flow of prana, and renders it powerless.

Indeed, it is not a Noble Phantasm one could be proud of its destructive power, but it has an ability that can be quite a threat. It is not an exaggeration to say the quality of a Servant's weapon is determined on the

prana or the magical abilities it carries. But in the hands of this Lancer, it can be predominant against a Servant who finds pride in the power of his armament.

"You'll have to give up on the protection of your armor, Saber. In front of my spear, you're as good as naked."

Saber snorted at Lancer's bantering words.

"It's a bother to see you triumph over just peeling off my armor."

Recognizing the threat of Lancer's spear, Saber still had no fear in her heart. The situation still hasn't been decided.

That moment, the silver armor covering Saber's entire body scattered in every direction in a splash.

Irisviel gulped in surprise. Lancer observed.

The chest plate, the gauntlets, the long tasksets shaped like a skirt that protected the legs; nothing was left. Saber had removed her armor by herself. The fragments of the armor scattering in a metallic dust immediately disappeared like a mist as Saber cut off her prana.

"If I cannot defend against your spear, I only have to strike instead. Prepare yourself, Lancer."

With a blue light dress, Saber resumed her stance. Lower, with her sword behind, she confronted Lancer one leg forward and the other behind. Without consideration for defense, this stance was made for a lethal strike that would slice from one shoulder to the other.

It was clearly visible to anyone that Saber intended to finish the battle with the next strike at the risk of her life.

"That's brave. All or nothing, is it?"

Lancer somehow seemed satisfied by finding again what he missed, but the tension was clearly noticeable in the tone of his voice.

Having taken off her armor, Saber didn't gain just agility. The prana needed to form and maintain her armor was now available for use in her offensive. This means a lot for the skill of "prana burst" that Saber possessed.

A "prana burst" is the accumulation of prana in her weapon and her entire body, momentarily injecting an arbitrary vector for an exceptional boost of

her abilities. So, to speak, it is a jet blast of prana for her movements. She only had the thin body of a small girl, but this was the secret that allowed her to brandish her big sword with the combat style of a power fighter.

The surplus of prana can be converted into mobility power for a close-range combat, but when Saber uses up to the prana needed for her armor in a "prana burst" it could grant her six times that bonus in power and speed... This is perfect for the destructive power of a one-hit-kill attack.

The handicap of losing the armor was overturned by the advantage of throwing away her armor. This was Saber's conclusion to deal with the "spear of exorcism" of Lancer.

"That heroism. This is a brave decision. I definitely don't hate that..."

Like a matador facing a mad bull, he kept provoking her by lightly shifting from side to side in a low position.

"If I dare say, that was my plan, Saber."

Not perplexed by those words, Saber replied with a bold smile.

"How about it. How will you feel after receiving this?"

Lancer understood. Saber's next charge will render the advantage of range of the long spear meaningless. If he can't grasp Saber's speed, he will meet his end when she will split him in two.

Calmly studying the opponent's light footwork, Saber measured the timing of her strike. Lancer too was probably estimating the speed of her charge with the density of prana she put in her body. But she still has one more secret ready for that...

By a little, just by a little, Lancer's movement weakens.

The asphalt torn up into gravels created many obstacles for a good foothold. Lancer's movement stagnates a little when he puts strength into his legs.

Saber didn't miss it.

A loud bang roars in the atmosphere. The golden sword that was invisible until then turned over the darkness of the night with its brilliance.

The Invisible Air that compresses the air and refracts light in an illusion can be used in another way. The instant the bounded field is released it can

blow the opponent with a single long-distance strike with a gale made out of the super high pressure of the condensed air.

And this was the application of Saber's plan. The point of holding the sword backward in a wide stance was for that— to accelerate the air strike even more.

Released from the golden sword, a jet of air comes out from behind Saber. By releasing her armor to increase her prana burst further, her body changes into a supersonic bullet.

At this point, Saber's speed is three times higher than normal. It's already too late for an ambush attack or an evasion the instant she steps forward. Even if Lancer's spear can deal a serious wound to Saber, he will receive a lethal strike the same instant. That is certainly a strike made to risk one's life for a certain victory, ready to even have her flesh cut or her bones severed. Breaking through the wall of air at several times the speed of sound, the shockwave of the rush blew the surrounding rubbles like leaves.

Lancer didn't move. Having already given up on an ambush attack, the tip of the red spear didn't flinch.

What moved instead was— his legs.

With an extremely focused mind, the flow of time, even shorter than an instant, stretches and grows slower.

That moment, Saber knew. The opening in Lancer was a bluff. It wasn't a coincidence that Lancer missed a step; he had placed himself to stop at the right position.

In other words, the position Lancer had chosen for his victory— was the spot where he had switched from two spears to one, dropping the short spear in his left hand.

Lancer's words were resurrected in her mind. "That was my plan."

Saber saw it at that time: Lancer’s threatening smile when he was sure of his victory. The glint in his eyes had spoken more than his words. "I will strike through your imprudence..."

Instead of picking the spear with his arm, Lancer kicked the gravels at his feet. It's not just gravels that flying in the air. The short spear that Lancer dropped earlier; its tip is accurately springing up through the air in Saber's direction. The amulet wrapped around the whole spear, just like the long one, was already unfastened, reveals the yellow metal under it.

Saber's sixth sense can theoretically surpass thought for a natural talent for battle decision, but it didn't predict her blunder.

One normally wields one spear with both hands— that was the trap of the misconception. She could only regard as bluff the capacity to have a spear in each arm.

If that was Lancer's way with the spear.

If that Servant was the Heroic Spirit known as the bearer of "the two demonic spears".

Yes, a Noble Phantasm— is definitely not limited to one.

The short spear that Lancer had kicked up, its tip was swirling with a prana just as sinister as the long red one, glaring at Saber. It was already predicting the instant it would pierce Saber's throat, as she could only charge forward, too late to brake...

Act 4

Act 4.

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"...Damn it. This is bad."

Rider, who was standing on the arch of the Fuyuki Bridge overlooking the battle taking place in the warehouse district, muttered softly as he stood up.

"Wha, what is?"

Seeing the giant Servant display impatience for the first time, Waver became agitated, and he questioned Rider while clinging to the steel frame.

"Lancer brought out a decisive technique. Looks like he wants the match decided quickly."

"Wouldn't that be favorable for us?"

"Fool, what are you talking about?"

Rider stamped his heel on the steel frame he was standing on with a bang. For Waver, whose entire body was clinging to the frame, the tremor shook him to his very bones, and another shriek rose.

"I wanted to wait out on the battle's development before everyone arrives, but by the look of the current situation Saber's going to have a disadvantage, and it would be too late to attack by then."

"Too late? – Didn't you want to strike when they have all become exhausted from fighting each other?"

"...I think you have misunderstood something, boy."

Rider furrowed his brows and tilted his head downwards to look at the Master lying beside his feet, as if disappointed at the performance of a humorless clown.

"I did hope that other Servants would take up Lancer's bait. Isn't it obvious? Rather than picking them out one by one, it's far better to get them all together and have a great battle royale!"

"..."

Waver forgot to answer; he was shocked out of his wits in realizing the differences between his understanding and that of the brave Heroic Spirit.

"Get them all together... a great battle royale?"

"Yes. It's such a rare opportunity to cross blades with the greatest heroes across all ages. If all six of them are here in completion, I won't let any one of them get away."

A fierce and dangerous growl as that of a lion seeped out of Rider's throat, but there was a tint of laughter as he tilted the ends of his lips upwards. Waver realized that only this man could wear a grin like that.

"Now then, Saber and Lancer. They both have the flaming spirit of true warriors. I admire them; it would be a pity to let them die like this."

"What else is there apart from killing them?! Isn't that the point of the Holy Grail Waa-!"

Waver's slightly hysterical voice was mercilessly interrupted by a smack to his forehead.

"Victory without ruin, domination without disgrace. That is true conquest!"

Rider proclaimed, holding his chest upright; then he unsheathed the sword by his waist and sliced through the hollow sky with a swing, cleaving apart the empty space.

An enormous shining Noble Phantasm immediately appeared, accompanied by spiraling torrents of galloping prana. Waver felt like he was about to be blown over by the sudden storm, swallowing his screams and hugging the steel frame even tighter.

"Observation is over. We will join the battle, boy."

Before his words were finished, Rider had mounted the Noble Phantasm with a leap, his mantle flowing.

"Idiot idiot idiot! You're acting nonsense!"

"Oh? If you don't want to go, you can stay here and look."

"I am going! Bring me along, idiot!"

"Good, that's more like my Master!"

Rider emitted clear laughter, took hold Waver's collar gently, and let Waver ride beside himself.

"Now roll on, Gordius Wheel • Wheel of Heaven's Authority!"

The Noble Phantasm answered the call of the King of Conquerors with a thunderous tremor.

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Gales surged. A confusion of life and death.

The moment that the swordsman and the spearman slid past each other, flowers of bright crimson blood fluttered and bloomed briefly – before fading away in the blink of an eye.

Saber, who charged past, stopped. The two of them turned at the same time.

They both still stood erect, without losing the thought of warring against each other. The two Heroic Spirits were still intact.

Finally, the battle had the slight possibility of moving away from the path of attacking each other. At that moment Saber took in the situation and made a quick decision that prolonged their duel.

As a result, the yellow short spear that poised to pierce Saber did not land on Saber's chest, but her left arm. At the same time the golden sword that Saber uplifted deviated just a little from Lancer's vitals, the edge aimed at Lancer's left arm... Curious how they were injured at the same place.

But were they damaged to the same extent?

"You still won't let me win easily... It's very good, that adamant manner of yours."

Lancer stared at Saber with a desolate smile, as if desperately trying not to pay attention to the wound on his elbow. As expected, like a film on rewind, Lancer's injury was healed without anyone touching it and left no trace behind. A Servant's self-healing would not manage to recover him that quickly; it must be his hidden and observing Master who used the healing magecraft.

Contrary to Lancer, even Saber's demure beauty could not hide her pain and anxiety.

Lancer's airborne spear and the sword clutched tightly by Saber's two hands had a definite imbalance in power. At least, from the outside, the wound dealt by the short spear on Saber's forearm seemed rather light compared to Lancer's injury.

"...Irisviel, heal my wound as well."

"I healed it! I did, but..."

Compared to Saber, who was injured, Irisviel's expression appeared even more flustered.

Irisviel was undoubtedly a first-rate magus. The strength and intensity of her craft goes without saying. She is, in truth, an exception in the world of magi, possessing a body that was ‘designed' and ‘manufactured'.

It would be impossible for her to make mistakes when using basic magecraft such as healing. Even if an error did occur on the off chance, Irisviel would know how to deal with it herself.

And yet –

"No, the healing did work. Saber, your current state is one of full health."

"..."

Saber did not dare to keep her guard down as she kept appraising Lancer with caution, and at the same time stared at the injury on her left arm. The wound did not bleed much and was quite shallow, but the problem was that her sinews were severed. The most important digit on her hand, the thumb, cannot be moved; therefore, Saber cannot exert enough strength to grip the sword hilt.

Saber knew that there is nothing wrong with Irisviel's healing methods, but the arm was not cured. Her left thumb felt as if it was born crippled, turning completely immobile.

Lancer paid no attention to Saber, nor did he resume his attack. Full of confidence, he bent down and retrieved with his left hand the yellow short spear that fell to the ground.

"In front of my Noble Phantasm Gáe Dearg • Crimson Rose of Exorcism, it's good that you realized armor is useless."

Perhaps he thought that after showing the effects of his Noble Phantasm, there was no point in keeping up the masquerade. Lancer spoke the true name of his Noble Phantasm with no hesitation.

"But you were rash to discard your armor. If you had not, you would have a defense against Gáe Buidhe • Golden Rose of Mortality."

Lancer, the long red spear in his right hand, the short yellow spear in his left, began to swing them exaggeratedly as though spreading a pair of wings, in exactly the same manner as when the battle first began. It was not

a gesture to seduce, but a unique battle style mastered after arduous training.

"I understand now... It is a cursed spear; wounds dealt by it would never heal. I should've noticed this earlier..."

A crimson spear that severs prana, a cursed golden spear, and a love spot below his left eye that attracts women – it was easy to determine once all those are put together. Based on legends, the glorious name praised by the Celtic legends of heroes was actually remotely related to King Arthur. It was quite incredulous that this did not occur to Saber.

"The first warrior of the Knights of Fianna... Diarmuid of the Love Spot. I did not know that the Grail granted the honor of participating in the war to you."

"That's the beauty of this war for the Holy Grail... But the honor is mine. For one that traverses time and space to join the Throne of Heroes due to its invitation would not mistake your golden sword for any other."

The Servant participating in the fourth Holy Grail War, Lancer... the Heroic Spirit of the Celts, Diarmuid ua Duibhne.

Lancer, whose cover was carelessly blown off, narrowed his eyes with a refreshed feeling despite that.

"Competing with the famous King of Knights to avenge your sword blow – Hmph, I wouldn't give this opportunity up either."

As Heroic Spirits who are separated by time, they had no historical connections. Through the legends of the past from the era that invited them forth, they managed to know the heroes that came after them. Diarmuid also knew of the legend of King Arthur that brought fame to his homeland after his time.

"So, since we know each other's name, I challenge you as a knight to determine the victor of this mundane battle – although I've already wounded your arm. Are you feeling that it's unfair, Saber?"

"Don't kid me. It would be more of a shame to me if you worry about such a small injury of mine."

Saber declared resolutely, while at the same time gritted her teeth with hatred deep in her heart.

Just one blow is not a big deal...

Saber gathered her prana once again to wrap herself in silver armor. Although it would be a waste of prana before Lancer's Gáe Dearg, it could still block the critical blow from Gáe Buidhe. Saber compressed the surrounding air and once more sealed her golden sword inside Invisible Air • Boundary of the Wind King.

Her wound cannot be healed. Most likely, the curse of the golden spear will not be dispelled until the spear itself is destroyed, or its owner Diarmuid has fallen.

Saber must break through Lancer's twin spears with her remaining right hand. With the aid of prana bursts, single-handedly wielding her sword would not be too painful. But the strength that could only be delivered with both hands was sealed, and she cannot use her ultimate attack: Excalibur • Sword of Promised Victory.

However – At this moment, far from cowering down, Saber's fighting spirit soared.

It was a meticulous plan to use one of his two Noble Phantasms first, and cunningly lure his enemy into carelessness. Saber was not angry with the trick; rather, she eagerly wanted to applaud Lancer's scheme.

This enemy is perfect.

She encountered such a flawless enemy for the first battle of the Holy Grail War. As a warrior who lived by the sword, it was inevitable that her fighting spirit ascend to the skies when faced with a fabulous opponent. At the same time Diarmuid ua Duibhne, the one that stood opposing Saber, was also forcing himself to face her not only with tricks but spending all of his wits on this ultimate battle.

Lancer would have detected Saber's vigor without words. A satisfied grin seeped up Lancer's mouth. His heart felt the exact same way as Saber's did. Lancer respected Saber for sacrificing her left arm to block the surprise attack of his Gáe Buidhe that was unleashed for the kill. It added an extra sheen to the joy Lancer associated with the worth of winning this battle.

As knights, the two Heroic Spirits even echoed each other on their souls' desire to do battle.

"Prepare yourself, Saber, I will win this time."

"Only if I do not win first, Lancer."

The two exchanged their bold provocations as both planned their next, fatal attack, slowly and cautiously approaching the other.

The holy sword and demonic spear were at the edge of an explosive situation.

The air that was cold and clear and full of tension – at that moment, it was suddenly cloven apart by a thunderous ruckus.

" – !?"

Saber and Lancer were both stilled with awe, simultaneously turning to look at the south-eastern sky. The source of the sound was clear for all eyes to see.

A flying object drew a straight line across the sky and was heading directly to their location, shedding violet sparks of lightning on its way. The sound was undoubtedly created by it.

Irisviel was dumbstruck as she said in shock.

‘…A chariot…?"

From its appearance, it was an antique chariot with two prows. War horses were not yoked on the shaft, but handsome bulls with muscles rippling like waves. Their hooves ploughed the empty space, pulling the luxurious and splendid chariot forward.

No, the chariot was not merely floating in air. Its wheels boomed loudly; it was not solid ground but lightning that the bulls stood upon.

Every time the bulls' hooves and the chariot 'stomped' upon the empty sky, violet lightning spread like a web, rolling the air upwards with deafening roars. The prana spurting from the lightning was probably what Lancer and Saber can only unleash if they use up every single ounce of their strength.

Only a Servant's Noble Phantasm can be so strange and emit such a great amount of prana. Without a doubt, a third Servant had decided to interrupt the duel between Saber and Lancer and was therefore showing himself.

"…"

Saber and Lancer both tensed and stared at the suddenly arriving chariot soundlessly. Irisviel's alarm was obvious, and the unseen Master of Lancer should have also felt a shiver of fear.

To be enveloped by such an enormous aura of lightning and thunder, the Heroic Spirit is most likely some sort of thunder god. And if it was a thunder god with a connection to bulls, the first one to come into someone's mind would be the highest god of Mount Olympus. Although this chariot cannot be called a Heroic Spirit itself, even as a Heroic Spirit's attachment it was very threatening.

The chariot that tread on lightning circled above Lancer and Saber menacingly, then slowed down and landed on the ground. It was positioned exactly between the two Heroic Spirits, blocking both the sword and the lance. The dazzling light that ceased as the chariot landed revealed the figure of a muscular man, standing commandingly at the helm of the chariot.

"Both of you, put down your arms. A king comes!"

This casual bellow was almost as loud as the thunders emitted when he rode upon the air. The fiery glare almost held the power to reflect back the opposing sword blade and spear tip.

Lancer and Saber are both famous Heroic Spirits; a yell or two is not going to scare them away. However, this new Heroic Spirit did not want to attack them, but just joined in because he wanted to intervene in their duel. The two of them began to hesitate since they did not understand the reason behind that action.

The imposing owner of the chariot first dented Lancer and Saber's vigor then continued to speak in a stern tone.

"My name is Alexander, King of Conquerors. I am participating in this Holy Grail War and received the class of Rider."

That was when everyone really became gob smacked. In the war of the Holy Grail no Servant would want to declare his identity as it could be a key component of his battle plans. Meanwhile, the most agitated people around was Waver, who sat beside Rider.

"What – the bloody hell do you think you're doing, stupid moron?"

His fear of Rider's looming bulk already forgotten; Waver shrieked at Rider while grasping the mantle of the King of Conquerors.

The merciless finger flick echoed in the night; the protesting voice died down. Only the middle finger of Rider's right hand paid any attention to it, and Rider asked with a glance to Lancer and Saber that were on either side of him.

"You slaughter each other to obtain the Grail… I want to ask you something before you engage.

I don't know what expectations you have of the Grail. But now, consider for moment whether your wishes are even greater than the desire to possess all of earth and heaven."

Although Saber still hadn't understood what he meant, her instincts told her that those words were full of danger. Her pupils widened subconsciously.

"You – what do you want to say?"

"Hum? I was quite clear."

By then Rider had maintained his dignity, but his voice was much gentler and more amicable.

"I have descended upon the battlefield, so do you have any intention to pass the Holy Grail to me? If you forfeit your claims to the Grail, I would regard you as friends, and share with you the joy of conquering the world."

"…"

It was such a random suggestion. Saber was dazed before she had a chance to feel angry. Opposite her, Lancer was also stunned speechless.

Alexander, King of Conquerors. He is indeed an extraordinary Heroic Spirit. There had no one else like him in human history, so full of eagerness to manifest his ambition of conquering the world.

But even so, what about Rider's suggestion? Suddenly jumping out, proudly declaring his true name, demanding others to respect him before he had shown his worth in battle: all those actions made it look like he has no desire to join the war for the Holy Grail.

It was the first time that anyone had seen something like this. It was hard to tell whether this was a wise decision or a foolish move.

"I admire your boldness in declaring your identity just then, yet… I found it hard to agree to your proposals."

Lancer shook his head with a bitter smile, but there was no laughter in his eyes. A glare as intimidating as a sharp sword collided head-on with the scornful sideway glance of the King of Conquerors; sparks flew.

"I will lift up the Grail; that is the oath I took with the only new king of this era. The one that will hold the Grail in his hands will not be you, Rider."

"...Did you stop my duel with Lancer just to declare all that nonsense?"

Saber asked, immediately following Lancer's words. Her expression was different from that of the beautiful spearman; there wasn't any laughter to be found. Rider's suggestion was extremely irritating for someone as serious as her.

"Your joke was overdone, King of Conquerors. This is unbearable humiliation to a knight."

Lancer and Saber both cast hostile glares towards Rider. Rider mumbled as if troubled, massaging his temples with his knuckles subconsciously at the same time. Although Rider appeared to be running out of plans, his majestic pose did not change at all. Therefore, Rider is actually someone rather rare.

"... Are you offering terms to me?"

"Enough!"

Feeling that Rider might make some attempts of flattery, Lancer and Saber simultaneously refused him. Saber continued with disappointment written on her face.

"Besides... I am also that lord that rules the kingdom of Britain. No matter what kind of a king one is, he can never bow before another lord."

"Oh? The king of Britain?"

Rider showed interest in Saber's declarations and raised his eyebrows.

"How surprising. The renowned King of Knights is actually a young girl."

" – And would you like to try the blade of that young girl, King of Conquerors?"

Saber lifted her sword as she lowered her voice. Her left hand was still powerless to hold the sword; its four fingers were just resting on the hilt. The fighting spirit that rose wavering from the blade, however, was more solemn and majestic then when she fought Lancer. Rider furrowed his brows and let out a long sigh.

"My – breakdown of negotiations, is it. What a waste, that's too bad."

When Rider looked down and mumbled to himself, he found the glance that was full of hatred that looked up from beside his feet.

"Rider..."

He had the pain that came with his swollen forehead, but his regrets were more tragic than that pain. Waver's deep cries passed through the air.

"Now what? Talking again and again about conquest, and people still dislike you... do you really think you can beat Saber and Lancer?"

The stocky Servant faced his master's questions with no sign of remorse but began to laugh heartily.

"Err, well, wasn't there a saying that says actions speak louder than words?"

"And your action is just to say your true name out loud like that!?"

Waver was so angry that his head was dizzy. Using his two weak fists, he continued to hammer at the breastplate of Rider, who was just standing there, and started to cry tears. Looking at this sad situation, Irisviel felt neither contempt nor sympathy. She just felt that she couldn't take it anymore.

The atmosphere that had subtly relaxed –

"Oh? It is you, of all people."

– Suddenly became tense again with the low, resentful voice that crept along the ground.

It was the still-concealed Master of Lancer. Ever since he had urged the Servant to use his Noble Phantasm, the observation had been very quiet. Now he was interjecting to ask Waver's purpose in coming here.

It was a sound that was completely different from the tone used before; something that exposed a heart drunk with hatred.

"And I was wondering what you stole my Holy Relic for in your outrage – I didn't think you would actually have the guts to join the Heaven's Feel on your own, Waver Velvet."

Waver heard someone calling his name with malice and knew that he was the subject of that hatred. Not only that, Waver may be able to guess the owner of that voice.

"Ah... uh..."

How could he not predict it? With his rank as high as lecturer of the Clock Tower, Holy Relics for other Heroic Spirits can still be prepared even if Alexander's cloak was stolen. Therefore, at the land of Fuyuki, it is not a surprising thing to have this man standing before Waver as his enemy...

"What a pity. It's a shame, really. I actually wanted my poor beloved student to be happy. Waver, someone as mediocre as you only deserve to possess the calm and stable life of commoners."

Waver was dazed with delusions, unable to determine where the voice came from. He no longer knew how many times he had experienced the nauseating feeling in his stomach – Lecturer Kayneth El-Melloi Archibald. The feeling of having those crystal blue eyes that held a mixture of humiliation and pity, which glared down at Waver from the lecturer's mean and slender face somewhere above the boy's head – he felt it acutely once again.

Waver wanted to return some smart remarks to the lecturer. Waver had, before his lecturer had managed, skillfully made the Heroic Spirit Alexander into a Servant that obeys him. Was that not the best revenge for the humiliation that he suffered at the Clock Tower for such a long time?

Yes. It is no longer a relationship of teacher and student. He is now my true enemy. I can hate him as much as I want, even going as far as taking his life. Now he is undoubtedly my real opponent.

During the few years that Waver spent at the Clock Tower, he had always hated that haughty lecturer in every waking and sleeping moment, even considering killing him for a few times – yet, it was the first time that he was faced with such enmity from his lecturer. The youth Waver experienced the gaze of a true magus that was full of the desire to kill for the first time.

However – the reverse is also true.

The owner of the voice saw the petrified fear on Waver's face with his sharp sight. With a tone of icy mockery that sent Waver's hair to stand on its end, he continued to speak as if toying with Waver.

"Well, I can't help it, Waver-kun. Let me give you some extra tutorials. The true meaning of the slaughter between magi – I will pass the terror and the pain of the kill onto you without any reservation. You should be proud."

In fact, Waver was already shivering with fear, not even paying attention to the humiliation brought by those words.

To become a true magus, one must be prepared to be killed… A theory that was usually comprehended through books was keenly felt by Waver. The glare that the man shot from who-knows-where was more lethal still. The moment when a magus wanted to kill is the moment when the death sentence is pronounced – Waver did not know that until now.

Then, something enclosed the slender lone shoulders of the boy, which was shivering from terror, in a gentle and powerful embrace.

Waver was befuddled of the rough yet gentle touch. The hand of the stalwart Servant – with coarse fingers that are thick with calluses could only induce dread from the short Master.

"Oi, magus. If I understand correctly, you were supposed to be my Master instead of that kid, apparently."

Rider called out to the unseen Master of Lancer. In fact, his face was covered and twisted by a huge smile of malevolent pity.

"That thought is beyond ridiculous. The man that deserves to be my Master should be a warrior that rides with me into the battlefield, not a coward that doesn't even dare to show his face."

Silence descended; only the anger of the unseen Master could be felt spreading along the night air. Rider suddenly laughed into the empty sky, a roaring laugh that exhausted the airs in his lungs.

"Come on out! There must be others. Friends that are hiding in the darkness and spying on us!"

Saber and Lancer were both shocked.

"– What are you doing, Rider?"

Facing an inquiring Saber, the King of Conquerors did a thumb-up accompanied with a hearty smile.

"Saber and Lancer, your frontal battle is most excellent and fine. The clear sound made from the clashing of sword and spear would perhaps attract more than one Heroic Spirit, don't you agree?"

Irisviel was trembling at the thought that Kiritsugu might have been discovered in his unknown hiding place, but Rider only had other Servants in mind. Rider wanted to deliver the deafening sound to every corner of the surroundings and bellowed once again.

"What a shame. What a shame, really! The heroes of might gathered at Fuyuki! Seeing the prowess displayed here by Saber and Lancer, does it not invoke any sentiments from you? Having a name that deserves praise yet concealing yourself and spying in secrecy; what cowardice. Even Heroic Spirits would be troubled upon hearing this, huh?"

After another fit of laughter, Rider tilted his head with a fearless expression at the corner of his mouth and ended with a challenging glance.

"The Heroic Spirits invited by the Holy Grail, gather here at this moment! For those cowards that fear to show their faces, spare yourself the humiliation that Alexander, King of Conquerors, would deal to you. Prepare yourself!"

Rider's enthusiastic speech even passed to Emiya Kiritsugu, who was hiding in the distant container port conducting his observation. It was also heard by Maiya, opposite Kiritsugu's position.

The minds of ancient heroes were so far removed from Kiritsugu's own that he couldn't even sigh in response.

"...That fool managed to conquer the world?"

"..."

Opposite the intercom, Maiya also appeared like she could not understand the situation.

Like Kiritsugu and Maiya, the secretly observing Kirei also saw all of Rider's actions and heard his senseless words through Assassin's eyes and ears. At the moment Kirei was at the distant Fuyuki church, and Kirei had told everything he saw and heard to Tōsaka Tokiomi through the jewel communicator beside him.

"... This is bad."

From the distant Tōsaka residence such an irate sentence was heard.

Although Kirei knew the speaker couldn't see him, he furrowed his brows and nodded.

"Indeed, it is."

Tokiomi and Kirei did not disregard Rider's nonsense talk like Emiya Kiritsugu did. The reason was that they both thought of one particular

Heroic Spirit, who would never ignore something like Rider's challenging words.

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A golden light immediately arrived following Rider's bellow.

The light was still faltering out, and there already was no surprise left in the heart of the spectators. It wasn't just a wild guess anymore that this was a fourth Servant who had made an appearance responding to Rider's provocation. The dreadful point is that the beginning of the hostilities was a gathering of four Servants already. Nobody could possibly conjecture what the turn of events would be.

As expected, the golden light came from 10 meters above, atop a street pole, where a figure standing in a shining armor could be seen. Waver held his breath at the sight of such dazzling dignity.

"This guy is..."

He had seen him for only one instant the previous time, but there was no mistaking such an intense existence. The one standing calmly atop the streetlight was none other than the enigmatic Servant who had sent into oblivion with an overwhelming destructive power the Assassin who was invading the Tōsaka mansion the previous night.

This couldn't be Caster, his entire body covered in armor. If he had materialized in response to Rider's call, it meant he had the sense to recognize the provocation as such, thus he couldn't be Berserker.

By elimination, the only one left was— the last of the three Knight classes, Archer.

"I didn't expect there would be two fools in one night to have the insolence of calling themselves "kings" and ignore me."

For his very first words, the golden Heroic Spirit looked very displeased, scorning from above at the three Servants with a glare. His arrogance and his tone were comparable to Rider's haughtiness, but it differed from the

very root. There was never cruelty and mercilessness in the voice and eyes of the King of Conquerors.

Even Rider didn't expect anyone more domineering than himself to show up, as he was stroking his chin with a bewildered look void of malice.

"You are mistaken… I, Alexander, am the one who is well known throughout the world as the King of Conquerors."

"Fool. The only hero in Heaven and Earth who is a real king is me. The rest are a collection of mongrels."

Archer threw him aside with a declaration that was more than an insult. Of course, color was already drained from Saber's face, but the tolerant Rider drew an amazed sigh, ignoring it altogether.

"If you want to say that much, could you first announce yourself? If you are such a king, you couldn't be ashamed of your fame?"

At Rider's banter, Archer's crimson eyes grew even more of a proud anger as he glared at the giant under him.

"Are you questioning me? A lowly mongrel questioning a king like me?"

Frankly speaking, Rider's point was reasonable, but apparently, Archer took it as an incorrigible disrespect from his point of view. This wasn't a matter of gaining interest from concealing one's true name, but rather from a personal irritability, the golden Heroic Spirit was emitting a very clear murderous intent.

"I grant you the honor of my presence, yet you can't recognize me; such ignorance isn't even worth living."

At Archer's conclusion, the space around him distorted in a haze— the next instant, the glow of beautiful blades started coming out of the empty space.

There are bare blades as well as spears. Each of them is decorated with eye-catching ornaments and emits a fierce magical power. It is clear they are no common weapons but Noble Phantasms.

Without a doubt, this is the same thing as the previous night— the mysterious attack that unilaterally wiped out Assassin. All of those who were observing the Tōsaka mansion the previous night understands that.

Waver was struck with awe. The unseen Master of Lancer gulped. Kiritsugu and Maiya as well, observing at a long distance, also felt the tension.

And now, one man— just like Rider and Waver, one Master who had been following Lancer's movements through the day and was now observing hidden in the storehouses; as that man was spying on the battlefield through the vision of a familiar, he stared at Archer's strange battle preparation.

Yes, it was undoubtedly the same. Archer was definitely the golden Servant who had defended the Tōsaka mansion from Assassin's invasion the previous night, in other words, this was Tōsaka Tokiomi's Servant.

"Ha-ha, hahahaha..."

In the darkness, an old hatred burning in his one bloodshot eye, Matō Kariya let a laugh escape.

Now was the time he had anxiously waited for. He had endured a year of living hell looking forward to that instant.

Tōsaka Tokiomi...

Husband of Aoi, father of Sakura, yet the man who had trampled over the happiness of the mother and child.

The hated, cursed sworn enemy who took everything Kariya wished for, who degraded it all.

Now, the old resentment is cleared away. This was the time to face that man, changing into a sword the hatred boiling in his heart——

"Kill him..."

There was an unimaginable pleasure in filling his voice with hate. Now, Kariya understood the meaning of the saying "revenge is a dish best served cold."

Tokiomi himself can wait. His Servant must first be demolished, to make him lose the Holy Grail War. He was in a maddening excitement just thinking of Tokiomi's face smeared in the frustrating humiliation.

"Kill him, Berserker!! Pulverize that Archer!!"

At that time, somewhere else, an unexpected torrent of prana swept in a roar.

As everyone was watching, the flowing prana gathered and solidified, materializing into the shadow of a robust man.

That shadow stood up near the four-lane road that had become the battlefield of Saber and Lancer, two blocks further toward the sea. Truly, that was a fantastic apparition that could be described as nothing other than a "shadow".

From the width of the tall figure's shoulders, this was the body of a man, completely covered in a full armor without any opening. But it was different from the silver armor wrapping Saber or the luxurious golden one of Archer. This man's armor was black. Without any delicate ornament, with no polished luster. Like darkness, like Hell, it was just a bottomless black. The face was also invisible, covered with a rustic helmet. In the depth of a thinly carved slit, there was the ghastly glow of a pair of eyes with a glare burning like a flame.

A Servant. That was plain. Yet, just what Heroic Spirit was this sinister appearance?

This black knight definitely didn't have any of the "radiance" that bore the other Servants who were already there. Artoria, Diarmuid, and the King of Conquerors Alexander as well as the yet unannounced golden Archer all have that "shine". This is the expression of the pride of a Heroic Spirit. The honor of the legends everyone praises and longs for. This is an essential element of their "noble phantasm".

But the newly appeared black knight had none of it. You could say he was closer to an Assassin. The darkness around the black armor definitely held a "negative surge".

Thus, more than a Heroic Spirit, he might be labelled a vengeful spirit instead...

"... Hey, King of Conquerors. Did you invite that guy too?"

Still observing the black knight carefully, yet with a light tone, Lancer railed at Rider. Taking the hit, Rider grimaced.

"Invited, eh? That one doesn't look like he'll take any negotiation, ugh."

Nothing but blood thirst flowed from the black knight. Even the whirlwind of prana seemed ominous as a groan full of deep hatred.

Berserker... Everyone could see that without waiting for a confirmation. Such a fiendish surge of murderous intent could only come from the class of the Heroic Spirit of fury.

"So, kid. What kind of Servant is he, that guy?"

Rider asked Waver, but the small Master shook his head, dumbfounded.

"... I don't know. I simply can't tell."

"What? You're a Master, aren't you? His strong and weak points should be visible to you, eh?"

As a Master who has made a contract with a Servant, it is possible to read out the status of a Servant with powers of clairvoyance. This is a unique ability granted by the Grail that has summoned the Heroic Spirits. This doesn't work for the fake Master that is Irisviel, but Waver, rightful Master of Rider, is capable of seeing through the abilities of the other Servants and compare them to those of Rider, to guide him as efficiently as possible in battle situations. In fact, Waver already had a clear understanding of the faculties of Saber, Lancer and Archer. But—

"I said I can't see it! That black guy is definitely a Servant... But I just can't read out his stats!"

Rider frowned in suspicion at Waver's confused explanation and took a new look at the black knight.

The armor with the color of darkness shows no characteristic feature and tells no clue on the lineage of the maker. —No, it isn't just that there are no details to see; it is all blurred.

It wasn't just Rider. Saber, Lancer and Irisviel had also noticed the same thing. No matter how carefully one would watch, he just wouldn't accurately perceive Berserker's figure.

Just like an off-focus photograph, the outlines of the black armor were always shifting, like a mist, and you would sometime see it double or triple. Somehow, the material seemed to be made out of a hallucination. It isn't just the vision that was affected; it also matches the clairvoyance of the Masters. That would be some sort of unique curse that fakes the person's true identity. It couldn't be a skill proper to the Berserker class.

"Looks like another troublesome enemy we have..."

Saber nodded at Irisviel’s murmur.

"That's not all. With now four opponents, we can't do any careless movement."

In a regular battle royal, the most reliable tactic is to smash those in numerical inferiority with a concentrated effort. Thus, if they show one weakness here and now, they might be forced into the worse outcome, a four to one hopeless battle. In this case, even Saber doesn't stand a chance.

Who will start attacking who, and who will take that chance to make his move— To survive in this place, one needs to accurately see through everyone else's movements? This is true for all Heroic Spirits.

Presently, Rider isn't targeting anyone in particular. His current purpose is probably to have a look at the Heroic Spirits participating in the Holy Grail War. But as one who knows no fear, he is the kind of man who stands up at anyone's challenge.

Archer clearly sees Rider and Saber as his enemies. The golden Heroic Spirit seems to take ill humor in the two who call themselves "King of Conquerors" and "King of Knights". His preferred target is likely the one who provoked him, Rider.

There is one problematic person left.

Berserker. Nobody could figure out what was the intention of the black knight in materializing here and now. It added to the mayhem in which nobody could take control of the situation. No prudent Master would think of pitting his Servant in the middle of this chaos.

No doubt anyone would be equally wary of Berserker, yet there was one exception. There was no doubt or hesitation in Archer's crimson eyes, only an absolute anger and murderous intent he was holding in while looking down at Berserker.

The disgusting stare of the black knight was turned only at him standing on top of the street pole; the golden Heroic Spirit could undoubtedly see that.

"You mad dog, do you expect pity from me?"

A lowlife's gaze is equally lowly and filthy. Being poured by this gaze is an intolerable disgrace for a nobleman. To Archer, who claims the title of king even more than Rider, Berserker's ill manners made him a complete criminal.

The treasure swords and spears all around him changed direction. Their tip was now fully aiming at the new target; that is, Berserker.

"You shall at least entertain me when you scatter away, mongrel."

A sword and a spear bustle in the air at the heartless verdict.

The weapons coming out of nowhere shot without warning— this must be the reason the golden Heroic Spirit is an archer. But this off-hand Noble Phantasm was too abnormal. The Noble Phantasm, which should be a treasure to the Heroic Spirit, was being pitched carelessly like you'd casually throw a handful of stones.

Still, the destructive power was enormous. The road surface was blown up like it was hit with an explosive blast, and the scene was shrouded by the dust of the asphalt pulverized into particles.

"... Kh!"

Everyone gulped equally.

In the thick dust, the shadow of a dark, tall figure wavered into their visibility.

Berserker stood unharmed. He had merely moved from his starting point, where the road had become a crater. Out of the weapons thrown by Archer, the spear is the cause of this, hitting its target after being delayed a little. And the sword that should have reached its target a little before the spear had brought no destruction.

The reason for that would be that the sword was in Berserker's hand.

How many had seen the swift offense and defense? At least Irisviel and Waver couldn't understand what had just happened. Truthfully— Berserker had grabbed the precious sword effortlessly, the first strike thrown by Archer, and with his newly acquired weapon he had deflected the second strike, the precious spear.

"... That bastard, is he really a Berserker?"

Rider responded with a howling voice to Lancer's strained murmur.

"For someone who has forsaken his reason for madness, he's a remarkably skilled chap."

A Noble Phantasm is a weapon for the exclusive usage of the Heroic Spirit who owns it. Another Heroic Spirit who gets a hold of it won't be able to handle it correctly. Be it by miracle or skill, it should be properly impossible to repel a consecutive strike so clearly in a flash.

And yet, more than surprise, it was apparently rage that came to Archer. All kind of facial expression distorted his elegant face, frozen in a murderous frenzy.

"— How dare you touch my treasure with your filthy hand... Do you want to die that badly, you cur!"

The air around Archer starts dancing again. Like a halo, a golden majesty twirls in circles to show a flock of new Noble Phantasms— now sixteen of them.

Not just spears and swords. There are axes. Hammers and halberds. Even items with indefinite usage or origin, bladed weaponry with a strange shape.

Every single one of them is polished like a mirror, and still has an enormous amount of prana flowing from them. Not one of them is below the level of a divine mystery... All of them, no exception, are indeed Noble Phantasms.

"That's, not possible..."

That was Waver thinking out loud. But the other master’s and Heroic Spirits probably thought likewise.

A Heroic Spirit doesn't need to stop at one Noble Phantasm. Sometime, someone can treasure three, four super weapons that qualify as such. But nobody could have that many.

And here— Archer is throwing them one after the other like he has an inexhaustible supply of them. And not one of them was even already seen in the battle against Assassin the previous night.

"Let's see— just to what point this little compulsive thief can keep up!"

At Archer's command, the flock of Noble Phantasms floating in the air were left loose, rushing toward Berserker.

A thunderous roar shook the night air, a flash of light exploding through the sky.

Who would believe that such destruction could be done by throwing swords and other similar weapons? A countless number of Noble Phantasms rained down on the road of the warehouse town, which already looked like it had received carpet bombing.

And still, Archer's fierce attack didn't stop. The Noble Phantasms fell like thunderbolts, shot at Berserker's standing place with enough force to scatter anything away, and kept striking and striking and striking again. The attack was continuous, even increasing in violence. —Because the target, Berserker, just wouldn't fall down.

Everyone was shocked. Even in a critical situation with a great number of enemies around, everyone shared the same thoughts.

This was a replay of the miracle of the first attack. Berserker just took the first halberd that came at him with his left hand, then swung left and right the sword in his right hand, repelling every single one of the following Noble Phantasms away.

Such a technique was subtle and flawless. There was grandeur in it. Even with a Noble Phantasm snatched from Archer, the handling wasn't poor by a bit. He was swinging them around freely, like extensions of his arms; it simply looked like a demonstration of his polished skills with the favorite weapons he had specialized in for years.

Both offense and defense followed their course together.

Thinking about it, unlike the three other Servants, the identity of the golden Archer and the dark Berserker is still a mystery. Saber and Lancer shuddered at the threat. If they are to advance through the Holy Grail War, they may get to cross arms with these two. But in front of these beasts who are beyond reason, just how should they get ready to stand up?

"—The golden one seems to be proud of the number of his Noble Phantasms, but the black guy has the worst affinity with him."

The two Servants watched silently on one side, as the other one standing there, Rider, spoke confidently.

"When Blacky takes a weapon, he becomes stronger by just taking it. And Goldy throws them so shamelessly. He's a versatile fellow."

As the King of Conquerors calmly commented, Berserker wasn't taking one step back in front of Archer's fierce attack. On the contrary, when a more powerful Noble Phantasm flew at him, he would abandon his current one to exchange it scrupulously with the new weapon.

The violent roaring sound stopped when the last of the sixteen Noble Phantasms fell down.

In the hollow silence, there was only Berserker in the middle of the dust coming down. The surroundings, including the storehouses and streetlights, were all completely ruined. The black knight had a battle ax in his right hand and a simple sword in his left. All the other Noble Phantasms were scattered at Berserker's feet or stuck in the rubbles around. Not a single blade had reached the black armor.

Berserker nonchalantly raised the two remaining Noble Phantasms in his hands— and without preparation, he threw them in Archer's direction.

Maybe the aiming was off, or he didn't really try to hit anything, but the ax and the blade hit the pole of the streetlight that Archer was standing on top of. The blade hit the middle, and the ax, the top, cutting the pole into pieces as if it was butter.

The pole cut in three pieces fell in a tremor. But that's the only thing that fell clumsily on the ground. The golden Heroic Spirit had jumped before the iron pole was cut into pieces and landed on the ground apparently unscathed.

"Damn fool... Are you trying to put me on the same ground as you, me who should be at the top?"

—No, saying he was unscathed is only from a third party's point of view.

Archer's rage had apparently reached its critical limit. The wrinkles carved between his eyebrows changed his good features to an evil omen.

"You deserve death for your insult. You mongrel, I won't leave a single piece of your body!"

In anger, Archer howled at Berserker, his eyes burning crimson. For the third time, the space around him warped to let a herd of blades materialize...

The next count of glowing Noble Phantasms reached thirty-two. This time, even Rider kept silent. Berserker had endured a continuous attack of sixteen Noble Phantasms, but there was no way to resist twice that number. That was the same for all the other Servants. Nobody could estimate the limits of the latent power of the golden Archer anymore.

"Gilgamesh is serious. He intends to open the 'Gate of Babylon' even more."

Tōsaka Tokiomi held his head at Kotomine Kirei's comment coming from the jeweled communicator.

The basement of the Tōsaka mansion had none of the discomfort of the far away storehouse town that had become a battlefield. Kirei, manipulating Assassin, was bringing results. The conditions were perfect.

The only thing that wasn't part of the calculations was— maybe that the strongest Heroic Spirit, Gilgamesh, had come to the present time in the Archer class.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say the characteristic of the Archer class is the strength of its Noble Phantasms; for Gilgamesh who owned an extraordinary one with the rank EX, it might have been inevitable. But in the end, the skill of Independent Action of the self-conceited King of Heroes was high ranked, and that certainly was the biggest miscalculation.

Tokiomi respected the high prestige of the King of Heroes as much as he could, and as much as he deserved. But to think that his tolerance would be tested so much, so early...

Gilgamesh must be the last to move. Right now, this is still Assassin's turn to act and gather information. Something as rash as exposing the Gate of Babylon again to everyone— and throwing all his strength against the mysterious Berserker, this just can't be overlooked.

To a Servant with the skill of Independent Action, who doesn't rely on the Master, the only way to give him orders are the Command Seals. This grants the right for only three absolute orders. To make a Servant out of Gilgamesh who doesn't have an ounce of respect for his Master, they are all the more precious.

Always maintain your elegance— this is a family precept handed down for generations for the Tōsaka family. To him who keeps it to his heart, to be pressed into using a Command Seal before all the other Masters...

"Master, your decision?"

Kirei urges with a hard voice from the other end of the communicator.

Grinding his teeth, Tokiomi stared at the back of his right hand.

Staring at Berserker with a burning hatred, Archer slowly looked away.

He faced south-east. Over there is the hill of the Miyama district and the high-class residential area. How many people can guess it is the direction of the Tōsaka mansion?

"Do you think a sermon from someone like you could appease a king's anger? You're quite presumptuous, Tokiomi..."

With a tone of abject annoyance, Archer spat in a suppressed voice. The glow of the countless Noble Phantasms around him disappeared at once, off to somewhere else.

"... You dodged death by a hair, mad dog."

He was containing his resentment, but his crimson eyes had already lost the flame of the killing intent. With his firm haughtiness, the golden Archer glared at the row of Servants.

"You mongrels. Cut down the mob next time. I will tolerate no less than a real hero."

With this final careless remark, Archer cancelled his materialization. The golden armor lost its materiality and disappeared, leaving only the remains of its glow.

The confrontation between the two knights, golden and dark, reached its conclusion in a way no one expected.

"Humph. Apparently, this guy's Master has even more of a hardy character than Archer himself."

Amazed, Rider exaggerated with a bitter smile. But everyone else figured it wasn't the time for a careless remark. The Berserker who was evenly balanced with Archer was still standing in front of them.

The eyes glowing widely in the slit of the helmet first wandered in the empty space, having lost their target... Then, finding a new spoil, they flamed up again.

Stared at by those eyes dyed the color of malice, Saber felt a chill bustling through her spine.

"... Ur..."

The voice seemed to boil from the ground. Like a spell, like a curse, it was a moan full of malice that hardly resembled human speech.

This was the voice of Berserker, the first time the others heard it.

"... Ar... Ur... h!!"

Like a curse with a human shape, swelling from the murderous intent, the black knight charged at the silver King of Knights.

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Prana is consumed not just to keep the Servant materialized, but also for all the effort they do. Thus, in battle, the consumption rate is all the higher. The prana is extracted from the master’s Magic Circuits and is supplied to the Servant.

And the activation of the Magic Circuits, in Matō Kariya's case, means a hell of pain by having his body eaten by the Crest Worms.

When dematerialized, the prana consumption is at its minimum. Still, in that state, Kariya would sometime be tortured with palpitations and dizziness.

But when Berserker was materialized, the agony was beyond imagination.

The foreign body awakens, starts eating his flesh, creaking his bones. Acting as Kariya's pseudo Magic Circuits, the Crest Worms supply the sucked off prana to Berserker without concern for the host's limits.

Speaking about agony isn't even half of it. Being corroded, plundered by a living creature inside his body —the pain of being devoured alive doubles with fear and disgust.

"Guh... Ga, gwa...hh!!"

Hiding in darkness, Kariya stifled his scream of impending death, racking up his throat and chest. When his skin tore and blood started running, he started chewing off his nails on both hands.

For even more of a disaster, the prana consumption required from the Master by the Berserker class is even higher. When Zōken had Kariya use

the maddening formula during the summoning to make him stronger, maybe this really was already a plan of the old magus to tyrannize him.

The worms bite at his spine. The worms are melting his nerves. The worms are, nesting en masse inside Kariya's body, the worms are the worms are the worms are the worms the worms the worms the worms...

"Gaaaaahh..."

He was unable to hold out his scream, but only a feeble moan came out. The intense pain was choking him and wouldn't come out of his throat. As he started sobbing, Kariya kept trampling his body out of rage.

He couldn't even watch over the fight between Archer and Berserker in the main street. When the tempest of pain finally calmed down, it took Kariya some time before recovering his ability to think and get a grasp of the situation.

"... Haa... Haa..."

Roughly breathing away the remains of his agony, Kariya resumed his observation of the battlefield through the vision of his familiar. There are three Servants left. Archer is nowhere to be seen. The battle has ended.

Victory— is not acquired. Perhaps Tokiomi evacuated Archer when he realized the disadvantage.

Kariya's Berserker hasn't taken one step back in front of the overwhelming golden Archer. With a magecraft improvised in a year, Kariya was able to rival the Tōsaka magecraft polished through generations all by himself.

"... Fuhu, hahaha..."

Haggard, Kariya left out a dry laugh from his theory.

He did it. That haughty magus was finally splattered with mud by an ordinary man like Kariya, after always looking down to the likes of him. In his heart, Kariya sneered abundantly at Tokiomi and Zōken, thinking, did you see that.

I'm not a loser. Nobody will call me a failure or an insect anymore. I can fight against you. I'll have you know what fear is...

This is enough for tonight. There is no reason to continue a battle that will pain him now that his sworn enemy, Archer, has withdrawn. Just let the other Servants kill each other as they wish.

As he reached his conclusion, Kariya was the most panicked of them all when he saw Berserker took Saber as his new target and charge at her.

"Stop... Come back! Come back here, Berserker!"

He called out to him. Such a simple instruction should be enough to reach him, and yet the black knight didn't respond. Instead, the amount of prana consumed by Berserker's excitation stimulated all the Crest Worms at once, and pain shot again through Kariya's body.

"Berserker! Stop it!!"

With the pain, Kariya's voice was more like a scream. He didn't even have the mental freedom to use a Command Seal anymore. Swarmed by a torrent of agony, Kariya could only focus entirely on keeping a hold of his receding consciousness.

The black knight charged with the force of a wild beast, kicking the asphalt. He looked only at Saber, with a swirling, black killing intent.

Naturally, Saber isn't unprepared. She immediately readied her sword in a defensive stance.

"~~ ~~ ~~ ~~ ~h!"

Like a ghastly drive creeping on the ground, Berserker swung his current weapon down at Saber's head.

Saber blocked it safely with her invisible sword, but she was astonished when she identified what the weapon was.

An iron pole — this is what was left of the streetlight pole Archer was standing on top of, that tumbled on the ground when Berserker chopped it down. Berserker probably picked it up at his feet when he charged at Saber.

Berserker held the iron pole, over two-meter-long after being cut down, with two hands like a spear, putting a terrible pressure on Saber's sword. But the surprising point is that this weapon was nothing *but* an iron pole.

Saber's sword hidden under Invisible Air was definitely the holiest of the holy swords. It was the most supreme Noble Phantasm. There is no way it will have troubles against a piece of metal you pick up on the roadside.

The only thing that could possibly rival Saber's sword with such strength is the Noble Phantasm of another Heroic Spirit. Yet...

"Wh... at?"

Holding up, Saber couldn't believe her eyes.

The iron pole in Berserker's hands was being tainted in black. Black lines were spreading and multiplying like the veins of a leaf, invading the iron pole.

The starting point was Berserker's two hands. The black lines were spreading on the entire pole like a spider's web from where the black gauntlets are holding it.

This was Berserker's prana — the prana muddled with bloodthirst and hatred, possessed only by the black knight. The iron pole was receiving it by permeation from his hands.

"You can't mean...!?"

Saber understood through her surprise. The true nature of this Berserker's Noble Phantasm.

Lancer and Rider, watching closely, reached the same conclusion.

"... So that's it. When Blacky takes something, it becomes *his* Noble Phantasm."

Rider growled in admiration. The Noble Phantasm of a Heroic Spirit doesn't need to manifest through a characteristic object. Sometimes, it can be a type of Noble Phantasm that manifests through a "unique ability" retained by the Servant's very body. This is exactly the case for Berserker.

Still, what an astonishing power that was. Berserker was capable of pillaging at will the countless Noble Phantasms thrown at him by Archer. They now understand the frightening lure. The instant Berserker's gauntlets grab one, the control of Archer's Noble Phantasms go to the black knight.

Not only that, even ordinary scrap iron became full of the immense prana fit to compete with other Noble Phantasms once it came into Berserker’s hands. Unlike how the golden knight owned numerous Noble Phantasms, Berserker’s Noble Phantasm is endless.

The second blow, the third blow – Berserker pressed Saber back with impressive throws of his ‘spears’, while Saber was merely defending herself.

Saber’s left hand that was resting on the hilt had no strength in it, and the wound dealt by Lancer’s Gáe Buidhe started to hurt again. With only her right hand wielding her sword Saber could barely fight with the support of prana but faced with the torrential attacks sent by the furious Berserker she could only defend. Saber could not find a chance to retaliate, and gradually became disadvantaged.

"Saber...!"

Irisviel called out eagerly. Unnoticed, drops of anxious sweat seeped out of the King of Knight’s brow.

Emiya Kiritsugu, from his distant surveillance, also saw that Saber was in a tight spot. But with Kiritsugu’s current equipment he could not interfere in a duel between Servants.

If they could at least find out where Berserker’s Master was located, there might be ways to handle this... But Kiritsugu could not see Berserker’s Master with any of his two-night scopes.

"...Maiya, can you see from your side?"

"No, I can’t see him."

Kiritsugu furrowed his brows when he heard Maiya’s reply. Kiritsugu and Maiya’s positions were actually each other’s blind spots. The reason that they could not see the Master might be that Berserker’s Master also considered his own hiding place as a priority and did not stay at a position where he can deliver direct commands to his Servant.

It seems the opponent’s personality is even more prudent than Archer’s Master. For Kiritsugu, compared with those talented but flippant magi, magi who do not show themselves off are much harder to handle.

"...The situation doesn’t look good..."

Right now, it was not just a single combat between Berserker and Saber. In between the two of them stood Lancer and Rider, both at their full strength. On a battlefield where only the strongest survive, the worst position is to be at a clear disadvantage. The Masters of the other Servants must be thinking the same – at this point, by just helping Berserker a little, they can easily defeat Saber.

Then eliminate an exhausted Berserker. It would be two birds with one stone. Lancer and Rider can defeat two enemies with minimum prana expenditure.

Kiritsugu sighted his rifle towards the top of the crane once again. The Assassin with the skull mask was still sitting there. Just one moment of carelessness might cost Kiritsugu his life.

"...Damn."

Kiritsugu gritted his teeth but could only sit and wait.

The wound on Saber's finger cost her the maneuverability of her sword. Saber was keenly anxious because of that.

Of course, she was aware of how dangerous her situation was. While she needed to stall Rider, who was observing at one side, Berserker's fight with her had also become a stalemate. In the current situation – she didn't have any strength to fight Berserker anymore.

Berserker, on the other hand, mercilessly and ferociously attacked, fitting for the title of the Heroic Spirit of fury. Although Berserker continued to throw his iron 'spear' in a way as rough as a beast, the skill of the throws was nonetheless accurate and precise.

It was not Berserker's vigor that pressed Saber down, but his intensely fierce barrage gave Saber no way to retaliate. No matter how bad the wound on Saber's hand might be, as the strongest Servant Saber didn't even have a chance to strike back. On top of that, although Berserker's weapons were strengthened with prana, they were still twisted remains of an iron pole.

Berserker is definitely not a simple mad dog. The Heroic Spirit that became Berserker is a master warrior with amazing skills that even after his Mad Enhancement, he still possessed such an extraordinary ability.

"You... Just who are you?!"

Of course, the black knight ignored Saber's question, but threw the iron pole following his piercing vigor.

The strike could be called as an absolutely exceptional feat. The ferocity of the strike appeared to hit Saber's short stature and –

However, the thrown pole did not hit Saber.

The two-meter iron pole was split down the middle and fluttered from the air to the ground. It was Berserker's fake Noble Phantasm, with enough

strength to compete with Saber’s holy sword. What broke this fake Noble Phantasm with ease was a streak of red light that glimmered through the darkness.

Lancer had his back towards the astonished King of Knights. This beautiful spearman took a pose of protecting Saber, the King of Knights, whom he regarded as an enemy only moments ago, and stood against Berserker.

"Please stop your pranks now, Berserker."

Lancer pointed at the black knight with the tip of the long spear in his right hand – Gáe Dearg, the Crimson Rose of Exorcism, and coldly declared war on the black knight. If Lancer’s red spear repelled the prana of Berserker’s Noble Phantasm, then the fake Noble Phantasms covered by Berserker’s black prana would be nothing but bundles of iron.

"Saber has a previous engagement with me... If you keep up this nonsense and interrupt the battle between us, I won't stay quiet."

"Lancer..."

Although this was a fight to the death, Saber was immensely touched by Lancer’s words. The Heroic Spirit of the spear devotedly believes in the same ‘chivalry' as she does.

Despite that, not everyone gathered on this battlefield praised Lancer’s actions.

"What are you doing, Lancer? This is a good chance to defeat Saber."

A voice questioned severely. This displeased voice should be Lancer’s Master; However, Lancer unexpectedly donned a solemn expression unfitting to this Heroic Spirit,

"The fight with Saber is a battle that I, Diarmuid ua Duibhne, gambled my honor on!"

and yelled loudly at the empty sky.

"I’ll first let you see how I will kill that mad dog. Therefore, my lord! This duel between Saber and I..."

"No."

Mercilessly interrupting Lancer’s passionate plea, Lancer’s Master ordered with an even colder tone.

"Lancer, assist Berserker in killing Saber. I command you with the Command Seal."

The air on the battlefield froze with tension.

The Command Seal. An absolute order for a Servant. No matter how great a Heroic Spirit might be he cannot disobey a Command Seal. Consequently, Lancer no longer possessed his free will –

The tip of the red spear reversed direction and attacked, flying towards Saber with a low whistle. The two demonic spears, long and short, brushed past the shoulders of the rapidly retreating Saber one after the other in front of her face, sweeping across the sky.

Lancer used the two spears in his left and right hand to attack the target directly behind him without even turning his head around. This astonishing prowess with the spears, as though the pair could change form at will, is the show of Lancer's true strength. The accuracy of Lancer’s techniques didn’t even invoke his opponent’s rebuke.

"Lancer...!"

Saber was halfway through her sentence, but she suddenly went silent. Lancer turned around. Humiliation and anger filled his face with anguish; it spoke of the Heroic Spirit Diarmuid’s thoughts more than any mighty argument ever could.

For Lancer, whose body was bound by the Command Seal, his flesh no longer belonged to himself. It was merely a cruel and merciless machine called a Servant. All the skills and abilities the Heroic Spirit Diarmuid had gained were manipulated wantonly without regard to his own beliefs, used only to fulfil the master’s supreme command. As a Heroic Spirit, Saber deeply understood Lancer’s regret.

Beside Lancer, Berserker was closing in step by step. Although the situation had changed on the battlefield, Berserker’s goal apparently remained as Saber herself. Berserker picked up the iron pole that was cleaved in half by Lancer’s red spear, and this time he held it at eye level like a longsword. Although the shape of the Noble Phantasm had changed, there were no inconveniences with him using it.

Saber was out of options.

If her left hand was not injured, she might be able to fight her way out of this.

But now, Saber was at the limit of her abilities just handling Berserker alone. At the moment, with Lancer being her enemy as well, Saber has no chances of emerging victorious.

"... Saber... I'm sorry..."

Lancer moaned painfully but continued to advance towards Saber step by step. Contrary to Lancer's expression of shame, the quivering prana of the two spears on his left and right, hiding its killing intent, was raising in a haze.

The black knight beside Lancer remained silent as ever, but the intensity of his threatening surge was increasing exponentially and advancing towards Saber. A thick layer of black veins covered the fragment of the iron pole, turning it into something beyond a sword, alien and repulsive, and the tip of the splint was pointed with intimidation at Saber.

Saber stared calmly and intensely at those Noble Phantasms, gave a sidelong glance at Irisviel, and caught her gaze.

"Irisviel, I will handle the situation. During that time – "

Saber's thoughts were already running in circles. There's only one desperate measure left. She has to do this in such a grave situation. No matter how big a sign of defeat she was showing right now, she must protect Irisviel. Even if she is to lose her own life...

"During that time, I need to get you out of danger. Run as far as you can."

Saber nonchalantly reported this quick decision to Irisviel, but Irisviel did not detect Saber's true intention.

The proud maiden knight will cleave out a path for Irisviel to survive, at the expense of her own life.

Irisviel shook her head decisively. She did not expect Saber to sacrifice herself in even the smallest of ways.

"Irisviel! No matter what happens, you must – "

"Rest assured Saber. Believe in your Master."

Saber recognized the deeper meaning hidden in the sentence, but she was still very puzzled.

Kiritsugu – Is he here?

Actually, Irisviel did not help with Saber's confusion, but she had always believed firmly in Kiritsugu.

At this point, Saber and she did not do anything wrong. As per Kiritsugu's orders, they have fought honorably and made a big show in the open. Now Saber is the focus of the battlefield. Everyone regarded this delicate knight as a thorn by their side.

The two spears of exorcism and mortality, the iron soaked through with the black aura of the kill, did not threaten Irisviel. All this is proceeding as Kiritsugu had planned. That is – Saber and Irisviel should now be in an advantage.

Therefore – the rest is up to you, dear.

Faced towards her husband who was nowhere to be seen, Irisviel prayed with total conviction.

Emiya Kiritsugu decided to start acting, not because he detected his wife's worries, but from a clear analysis of the situation.

The first to be protected is 'the Vessel of the Grail', Irisviel. Since Saber can no longer protect her Master, right now no hesitation can be afforded.

"...Maiya. Match my countdown and attack Assassin. Restrain him."

The answer 'Understood' immediately came from the other side of the radio. The air was soaked with tension.

At this point, they need to kill Lancer's Master. That is the only way.

" – Six."

Kiritsugu began to count in a low voice and focused the heat-vision scope towards Lancer's Master.

After the WA200 sniper rifle was customized it was tested outside the country before it came into Japan, therefore Kiritsugu was already familiar with the gun's characteristics. However, he hasn't tested its compatibility with the night scope system... At this time, he can only rely on Maiya's skill.

" – Five."

According to Maiya’s report – the shooting range was adjusted to 500 meters. The reticle in the scope should be identical to the bullet’s flight path, from the muzzle to 500 meters out.

For long-distance shooting, the bullet does not travel in a straight line, but in a shallow parabola. That is, when the target is closer than the shooting distance, the bullet’s actual landing point is a bit off from the aim, a bit lower.

Lancer’s Master was less than 300 meters away; therefore, Kiritsugu carefully adjusted the aim.

" – Four."

Lancer was forced to attack Saber due to his master’s Command Seal. After his Master is shot dead, his reactions may be unpredictable, but he shouldn’t keep attacking Saber. Then the only direct threat would be the lone Berserker. Kiritsugu should come up with an idea that can get Saber and Irisviel out of danger.

The last question was Kiritsugu’s own safety. Under such a situation, he had no other choice apart from employing bold actions like firing right next to Assassin.

" – Three."

To reduce the risk, Kiritsugu is timing his shots with Maiya's. Her AUG fires a 5.56mm Remington high velocity cartridge. This power will not damage the Servant Assassin. However, if Assassin comes under sudden fire, he might ignore the other sniper in front of him – it goes without saying that the preparations are severely deficient.

"- Two."

Assassin might mistakenly take Maiya, who was only pretending to attack, as his enemy. However, Maiya’s position was far enough from Assassin for her to escape. Perhaps, due to the fear of showing himself in front of other Masters, Assassin would have left before that point.

However, in this already unexpected situation, Assassin might immediately assault Kiritsugu, who was right beside him. At that time, they can only fight on and hope for the best. In the first place, this has nothing to do with winning. That is the only way.

" – One."

Kiritsugu breathed quietly and slowly pulled the trigger. The Walther's muzzle was completely still; the hollow barrel was like a killing glare that locked its gaze on the target.

At this time, a deafening rumble reverberated around.

That loud sound was not Maiya’s AUG firing full-auto and was obviously not Kiritsugu’s shots, either.

That sound is not something a rifle would make when it fires, but an impact enough to shake the earth.

It was a thunderbolt that suddenly visited the battlefield. It had the dizzying flash of lightning that contrived to make night into day, and a roar that boomed greater than any thunder.

"Aaalalalalalalaie!"

The lightning didn’t descend from the sky but traversed across the ground. No – that thing that looked like lightning was the galloping chariot entangled by escaping electricity.

Lancer quickly flipped backwards and avoided the chariot in time. But for Berserker, who kept all his attention of Saber, he didn’t even have time to turn around and register what was going on.

Accompanying Rider’s war cry, the two divine bulls first kicked the black knight to the ground with their four front hooves, and then trampled the black knight mercilessly with their four hind hooves. Each hoof was enveloped with rolling purple lightning; just one kick would have been a very heavy hit. The divine bulls trampled upon Berserker eight times overall and his wounds must have been fatal. After Rider’s chariot roared past, Berserker didn’t even have the strength to stand. The figure with the black armor lied face up on the ground.

Rider sat on the stopped chariot and gazed down at his utterly defeated enemy. His spirited face was covered with smiles.

" – Oh? What happened to you, one with such a backbone?"

Berserker wasn’t dead yet. His body twitched feebly, and he slowly rose up from the ground. The black knight, who was stomped upon by the divine bulls, finally managed to bend his body around and crawl away from the chariot’s path. He had noticed Rider, and luckily avoided the decisive maximum impact of the chariot wheels.

Rider’s Noble Phantasm sped across in front of Saber. Upon seeing the Noble Phantasm’s overwhelming power of destruction, Saber was speechless.

Gordius Wheel… Its power obviously does not lie in fighting with individuals, but with armies. Even the gallop just then was carefully calibrated by Rider. Had Rider wanted to, even Saber, much less Lancer, would have fallen prey to those hooves and wheels.

The recumbent Berserker stretched out his leg weakly in an attempt to stand, but he had suffered a heavy impact and it seems he had realized he can’t possibly keep on fighting. Just when he has carefully stopped moving, his outline was already getting fuzzy and dissipating away like thin mist. He removed his physical form and resumed his spiritual form and ran away in that fashion.

"Under such conditions, I can only ask Blacky to remove himself –"

Standing on his chariot, Rider appeared as if nothing has happened. He called out with his face towards the sky and his robust neck bent.

"Master of Lancer. Although I do not know where you are hiding to overlook us, but you disgraced a battle between knights with despicable means… not fitting for a magus’s opponent."

At this point, the stalwart Servant smiled savagely, threatening the invisible enemy.

"Have Lancer retreat. If you still insist in humiliating him further, then I will join Saber and the two of us will defeat your Servant, how is that?"

"…"

The anger of the hidden magus enveloped the entire battlefield. But he did not hesitate.

" – Retreat, Lancer. That is enough for tonight."

After he heard the command Lancer heaved a sigh of relief and lowered the spear in his hand.

"Many thanks, King of Conquerors."

When he heard the whispered thanks of the handsome spearman, Rider gave a satisfied smile.

"That's nothing. The beauty of the battlefield is the show of affection."

Lancer once again expressed gratitude towards Rider with his gaze, then he nodded towards Saber.

There was no need for words. They have confirmed the oath between them. Saber also nodded towards Lancer.

The duel would continue at another time –

After Lancer confirmed this, he turned into spiritual form and disappeared.

After the destructive storm blown cross the battlefield, silence has arrived.

Soon after, as though suddenly remembered, the sound of the waves smashing against the cliff and the bustle of faraway streets crept back into the night sky. Lancer’s Master must have released the barrier cast in the neighboring area.

Saber gazed at the last person standing on the battlefield, Rider, with complicated feelings.

"... So, why did you come here, King of Conquerors?"

"Ah, I’ve never considered that properly."

Faced with Saber’s inquiry, the stalwart Servant appeared as if it didn’t concern him and shrugged nonchalantly.

"All those things like reasons and plans, those bothersome stuff, should be left for future historians to find a reason to give me. Heroes like us only need to obey our hearts’ desire, and gallop along the battlefield with our boiling blood."

"... That’s something only kings can say."

Saber’s disappointed reply was adamant. She believed in the chaste way of knights, a world away from Rider’s barbaric principles used justify his actions.

"Oh? Are you saying my way of kingship is alien to you? Hmph, that’s just natural."

Rider snorted and ignored Saber’s defiant glare.

"All ways of kingship are unique. For I, who am a king, is as incompatible to you, who are also a king, as fire is to water… You are trying to split this world into two clear bands of black and white."

"That is what I desire. Today, at this place, I'm also going to – "

"Enough, enough, don't be so vigorous."

Rider gave a small smile and pointed at Saber's left hand.

"As Alexander, I won't take advantage over your weakness like others would. Saber fulfil your promise with Lancer first. Then I would duel with Lancer or you, whoever might be the victor in the battle between the two of you."

"…"

Saber was about to rebuke, but her left thumb is too much of a handicap before Rider. It wouldn't do to underestimate the battle prowess of this Heroic Spirit, who defeated Berserker in one blow.

"Then, King of Knights, we're going to part ways for now. The next time we meet, I'll incite all of my hot blood to fight you… little master, have you got anything else to command?"

However, the youth that lied on the steering platform beside Rider's feet did not respond. Rider grabbed his collar and heaved him up, but this short little master's eyes were rolled back, and he had already fainted. Looks like Rider's power was too strong when he surprise attacked Berserker.

"… This one needs to learn how to be unwavering."

Rider sighed and placed his Master into his own arms, then tightened the reins of his two divine bulls. The bulls brayed, emitted thunder, and beamed rays of lightning from their hooves as they soared into the sky.

"Farewell!"

Accompanied by the roaring thunder, Rider's chariot galloped into the southern sky.

Irisviel finally disentangled herself from the tension and released the breath she was holding. When she looked about her, it was a scene of total devastation. That was to be expected. Five Servants were gathered at one place, with some of them unreservedly releasing their Noble Phantasms, destroying at will.

"The first battle was already conducted with such intensity. Had there ever been a Holy Grail War like this before?"

Irisviel was not worried about the traces of destruction. The Holy Church supervisor is responsible for the secrecy of the war. This place looks like it’s been through an earthquake. The supervisor must organize those employed by the Church and carefully mend the area.

Saber was still silent, staring at the sky that Rider flew past. Her delicate silhouette had no signs of excitement and exhaustion left from the savage battle, but just stood sternly and soundlessly on the battlefield. That figure of the girl clad in armor was like a painting, an image of beauty that allows no violation.

But Irisviel was different from Saber’s calm demeanor, because she knew Saber took a heavy wound.

"Saber, your left arm –"

"Yes. The hand hurts too much, what a disgrace. Like what Rider said, if I do not end my duel with Lancer and remove the curse of this wound, it will interfere with my battles with other Servants."

Irisviel couldn’t detect any sign of unease in the indifferent tone of the King of Knights. Instead, Saber’s resolution consoled Irisviel.

"... Thank you, Saber. My life was saved because of you."

Irisviel said with her head lowered. Saber replied with a smile.

"I fight in the frontline only to protect you behind my back, Irisviel."

Irisviel once again felt it with a pang; Saber’s strength, courage, and gentleness.

More than a dozen years younger than herself, the stature of a girl who is yet to be a woman – Such a delicate figure, such slender wrists, but she is a true knight, a hero.

"The war had only begun, Irisviel. Tonight’s battle was only the first night of the beginning of war."

"...Yes."

"They’re all strong enemies with equal might. Heroes invited from different eras... none of them can be easily disposed of."

There was no anxiety or fear in Saber’s voice. Before the coming of the storm, the heart of a warrior is both excited and calm. The soaring spirit and boiling blood would not change in any era, in any world. That is the true testimony of a hero’s soul.

The girl stared at the southern sky and proclaimed calmly.

"This is… the war of the Holy Grail."

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A black curtain was drawn across this space.

Not empty darkness, but viscous and condensed. Like fetid decaying matter, this darkness surpassed the limit of black.

The dense, nauseating smell of blood emanated out. The weak moans and cries that can be heard everywhere allowed one to sense the terrifying atmosphere. At the moment, the curtain of darkness that closed off all sight may instead be a screen full of mercy.

In such a darkness, there was a sphere that shone with a white light like the full moon viewed from beneath the water surface.

It was a crystal globe the size of a ball of yarn. The translucent, faint light came from the images floating within it.

Rubbles piled like mountains. A desolate nightscape. Yet this scenario was not present at the beginning. The current image of complete destruction was not present twenty minutes ago as it was simply emptiness. Behind its back, the crystal ball projected and recorded every detail.

Also, the two VIPs who saw all of the fighting. The dim light from the crystal ball illuminated the pair’s faces as both of their visages expressed unusual joy at the sight of destruction.

“Impressive! Truly impressive!!”

A happy demonic killer that stepped into this extraordinary world with an astronomical rarity - Uryū Ryūnosuke. His slanted eyes sparkled with a childishly innocent smile and began to cheer.

“Sir Bluebeard, everything that happened was real, right? Awesome! This isn’t just some video game platform!”

Due to the random chance of signing a contract with the Servant Caster, Ryūnosuke has since turned away from his daily routine and became ever stranger. He greedily sought excitement and pleasurable entertainment and treated the battle that had just happened as a supreme entertainment feast.

“So, this is the Heaven’s Feel? Sir, will you participate in this battle as well? Will you, sir, like the people we just saw fly in the air and shine?”

“……”

Caster did not respond but instead stared at the crystal ball passionately. Within the nightscape displayed in the crystal stood a petite figure. As if a ghost possessed him, Caster gaped blankly at her silhouette.

At the beginning of the monitoring of the battle on the storage street, Caster was in that intense state. He paid no attention to his master Ryūnosuke’s excitement nor did he care about the other Heroic Spirits. Only staring at one person.

Sterling silvery armor covered her fair and slender body; beautiful blonde hair flew like golden sand. The young woman, a Saber class Heroic Spirit invited from among the seven Servants.

Her body is most petite, yet she is the bravest and most majestic. No matter forced into what sort of trouble she showed no fear and firmly confronted her opponents. Caster cannot remove his sight from Saber; it was impossible for him to do so. Because that faraway reminiscent figure and the aura of nobility diffusing from her profile was precisely the illusion that Caster toiled for across time.

“…Sir?”

Ryūnosuke saw the face of Caster, who was silent from the beginning and lapsed into silence.

It was then he noticed the gaunt, pallid face was stained by tears of pure elation.

“…it has come true.”

Caster, overcame with excitement, whispered gently.

“…Everything has come true. I once thought …it was impossible. Yet the Grail is truly all-powerful…”

“It has come true. What, what?”

What? It was a question Ryūnosuke must ask. Caster’s exulted expression meant that something extraordinary has happened, while the reason for it left him puzzled even after thinking deeply.

“The Grail chose me!”

It was as if Caster cannot see the inquiry within his master’s eyes. He grabbed Ryūnosuke’s hand and shook it fervently, wishing to share with him his happiness.

“We do not need to go through with a battle, but we have already obtained victory. Yes. The Grail is already in our hands.”

“Yet I …I haven’t seen it, nor have I touched this supposed “Grail”!”

“That’s beside the point.”

Caster declared as his eyes widened, and he pointed at the young woman reflected within the crystal ball.

“Do you see that? She told me it. That august expression, her divine figure … she must be “her,” the one destined to change my fate!”

Ryūnosuke furrowed his brows, repeatedly studying the figure in the crystal ball. The young man or woman clad in period-style armor, whether it be a young man or woman has a rare beauty enough to rival Caster in modern Japan.

“…Do you know her?”

“I do know her. She is my light. She guided me forward. She gave me life. She is the purpose of my very existence…”

Caster, choked with emotions, placed his head in his hands and continued.

“She was once abandoned by God, annihilated in disgrace. But now, she has been resurrected. It’s a miracle! It was because of my faithful wishes that allowed her to be reborn!”

Ryūnosuke had no idea what was going on, but he could understand the man whom he admired, Bluebeard's current state of delight. Also, though he and Bluebeard have not been together for very long, Bluebeard can always reveal impressive ideas even at times of great distress. A new challenger to the world, a murderer – the strange man whom Ryūnosuke worshipped was a sadistic artist.

Therefore, to Ryūnosuke, Caster Bluebeard's happiness – whatever may have happened to him must be a good thing and certainly worth anticipating.

"For some strange reason, I'm beginning to get excited as well, Sir Bluebeard."

"Yes! Yes!"

Caster shook his hair loose as he simultaneously wept and cried. He clasped the crystal tightly with both hands as he pressed his forehead against its icy surface, his frenzied eyes staring at the face of the young woman.

"Oh… maiden, my holy chaste virgin… I will be with you soon. No matter what, please wait for me…"

The wet, snakelike smile lingered in the darkness.

※※※※※

After watching the story unfold, Kotomine Kirei ordered his Assassin to return from the field, and ceased his shared perception.

As Kotomine ceased his ability and stopped the smell of winds blowing over the sea and the sense of assessing the battlefield, he returned to the basement of the church.

Kotomine Risei appeared out of nowhere as he stood next to Kirei. It was as if he was listening to Kirei report to Tokiomi about the battle. As soon as the battle ended, Kirei assumed his position as regulator, rapidly giving orders with his cellphone.

"…Mion district. Yes, the streets and storage next to the sea. Massive damage…Ah, ah. Alright. Mobilize the city rangers to clean up the

battlefield…Use Plan D…I'll be depending on you for the on-site identifications…"

They have previously made arrangements with the police and the local government. Maybe on tomorrow's morning paper a completely distorted and glossed-over report on the tragic scene of the warehouses will appear.

As he eyed his father from a corner of his eye, Kirei begins his analysis of the people who appeared in tonight's battle.

The Clock Tower's elite magus, El-Melloi, has lost Alexander's artifact, of which he once possessed.

Tokiomi's spy had also once reported this. Alexander entered the Grail war as a Rider-class Servant, and his young Master seemed to be unusually connected with Lancer's Master.

But – there is no doubt that Lancer's Master is El-Melloi. After Alexander's artifact had been stolen by a young man named Waver, he must have obtained the Heroic Spirit Diarmuid's artifact.

When Matō summoned Berserker, Zōken had reported the event to his father. At the moment, neither Kirei nor Tokiomi paid much attention to it. However, they had not anticipated Servant Berserker's immense powers or his exceptional ability of harnessing an opponent's Noble Phantasm. He was a natural opponent for Tokiomi's Gilgamesh.

In order for the battle to swing in Tokiomi's favor…The other Servants must first defeat Berserker. This task is best accomplished by Lancer. Diarmuid's Noble Phantasm, Gáe Dearg, is the best artifact to nullify Berserker.

Caster and his Master remains a riddle as they have not yet appeared. But considering the class of Caster, there was nothing surprising. Other than Berserker, all the other Servants have already exposed their true names. In addition, the large threats Saber and Berserker also lost their respective battles. Especially Saber, whose wound will affect latter matches greatly. Gilgamesh displayed his Noble Phantasms with great fanfare and placed himself at a disadvantage, yet he did not expose his true name. Also, no one noticed the fact that Assassin was still alive. Thus, judging from the current situation, Tokiomi was still at a great advantage.

Kirei calmly calculated as he organized, but there was not one shred of excitement within his heart.

According to the wishes of the church, Tōsaka Tokiomi is to obtain the ultimate victory. Kirei's mission is to help Tokiomi achieve that goal. He

does not see many obstacles towards it. It was a mission without any real anticipation. It was also the conclusion of everything in the past three years.

“…Master Kirei.”

Kirei tensed. A shadow silently came up, next to him. Someone, a woman wearing a skull mask and garbed entirely in black; it was Assassin who was responsible for reconnaissance near the storage street.

“… What is it?”

“Reporting. I have located something strange outside of the church.”

Assassin respectfully handed the corpse of a bat. Though the head has been twisted and broken, it was slightly warm – suggesting it hasn’t died for too long.

“A familiar?”

“Yes. Though it is outside the bounded field, but it is obvious that it was placed there to monitor the church.”

“…”

Assassin’s conclusion was unthinkable. The church is neutral in the Grail war and is not to be challenged. If anyone dares to interfere in the affairs of the church, the regulator can choose to punish them by decrease Command Seals or to temporarily suspend the ability to battle.

There is no reason to risk such a great amount to monitor the church. Unless –

The story that Kirei has lost Assassin and is now under the protection of the church…Already is a Master doubting the validity of the event?

“…”

He picked up the corpse of the bat from Assassin’s hand. Kirei fixed his sight on a strange object as he noticed that on the stomach of the bat there were small electronic parts taped onto it. A button-sized battery and … seemingly wireless CCD miniature camera.

If the bat was a familiar from a magus, it must have been a strange combination. Kirei knew that most magi scorned and ignored the worldly technologies. His teacher right now, Tokiomi, was one such man. This magus, on the other hand, not only uses magical sight but also uses

machines to record everything. This is not something that a normal magus will even consider.

“… completely indiscriminating in their methods. Completely unaware of the pride as a magus…”

Like a lightning bolt, Tokiomi’s words flashed in the mind of Kotomine Kirei as he remembered his mentor’s words.

Kirei cannot deduct the magus who did this, or why he might have done this. He stared at the body of the little animal for a long time. In his heart, the answer to this riddle was more meaningful than tonight’s battle between five Servants.

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Lift the iron top of the entrance, move it aside – such simple affairs also required almost an hour. To the haggard Matō Kariya, it was tenuous work even if he put all of his strength into it.

At last, Kariya pried a crack as the lid slide aside and the refreshing air flowed into the disgusting sewers. During this short moment, Kariya felt reinvigorated. Utilizing all of his strength, he pushed the manhole cover aside and slowly crawled up like a caterpillar. There was not a single person on the streets. In the silence of the night, no one noticed Kariya’s shadow.

It was the same street that the Servants battled over. It was only three streets away from the four-lane road.

Kariya was different from the other magi. He was only a skimmer magus – lacking the formal training and learning of a real magus, he was like a student who just went to cram school. He was not like the others and does not share their arrogance or their carelessness. On the other hand, however, he does not have the confidence when confronting other magi. Add the fact that his Servant was Berserker…even if he wanted to command Berserker at his side…

Berserker will never listen to his commands.

Thus, it was probably better to allow Berserker to wildly lob bombs at his opponents. Let him rage. Kariya decided to first protect himself as he observed the events from a safe location.

Kariya detected the scent of Lancer as he chased the Heroic Spirit to that location. As the battle began, he decided to not expose himself. Sending out “sight worms” obtained from Zōken, he hid in the sewers and observed the battle from underground.

Trying for a long time to stabilize his breathing, Kariya collapsed on his back on the freezing asphalt.

Blood covered his body. Most of his capillaries have exploded. Blood slowly flowed non-stop from the cracked parts of his skin.

A long time ago, Kariya once saw the victim of a nuclear power plant explosion struggle against disease. Right now, his appearance and situation were no different than the victim prior to his death. His body of flesh has already been destroyed. But there are Crest Worms spread across Kariya’s body. Its magecraft extended his lifespan and allowed him to wiggle.

Kariya cannot believe that his body was reduced to this state. When he supplied prana to Berserker, he felt as if the worms had already devoured his entire body.

Merely one battle and he has turned into this.

The backlash and responsibility for controlling Berserker was far beyond what Kariya can handle. In addition, Berserker is completely ignorant of Kariya’s orders – he was like a bloodthirsty beast.

As soon as he lets go, Berserker will butcher everything it sees, and it will not stop until all of its prana is spent. If the battle had continued for much longer, all would have been lost. Kariya would be drained into a dry husk by the worms as he would have been forced to supply more prana – more than his body would ever be able to handle.

To Kariya, the battle among Servants was truly risky. If he couldn’t endure to his limits and stop Berserker, the only thing that’s waiting for him is his own destruction.

Kariya thought about the various aspects of battle. He sighed deeply and cannot help but to think that the future was grim.

In order to defeat Tōsaka Tokiomi, there was still a long way to go.

Then, to defeat everything else and obtain the Grail…that future was even further away.

Yet to save Sakura, he must overcome all of his obstacles.

There is only pressing on. He cannot fall. Even if it costs him every last drop of his blood and every inch of his flesh, Matō Kariya must reach that far distant shore. If he cannot succeed, then all would have lost meaning.

Kariya forced his extremely weakened body to rise as he unsteadily stood up. He cannot slumber here forever.

Berserker has been hit by Rider’s Noble Phantasm. The damage was enormous. Without question, in order for it to fully heal it would take a great amount of time.

And prana. The prana Berserker requires to repair its body can only be obtained from the worms in Kariya’s body.

Kariya needs to rest.

He leaned against the wall. Struggling, Kariya’s body was incapable of standing alone as his and his wavering gait disappeared into the night.

Postface

Urobuchi Gen

Urobuchi Gen wants to write stories that can warm people's hearts.

Those who knew about my creative history would probably furrow their brows and think this is a cold joke. Actually, I couldn't completely believe it, either. Because when I start typing out words on the keyboard, the stories my brain comes up with are always full of madness and despair.

In fact, I wasn't like this before. I've often written pieces that didn't have a perfect ending, but by the last chapter the protagonist would still possess a belief that 'Although there will be many hardships to come, I still have to hold on'.

But from I don't know when, I can no longer write works like this.

I am full of hatred towards men's so-called happiness and had to push the characters I poured my heart out to create into the abyss of tragedy.

For all things in the world, if we just leave them alone and pay them no attention, they are bound to advance in a negative direction.

Just like no matter what we do we can't stop the universe from getting colder. It is only a world that is created through a compilation of 'progresses of common sense'; it can never escape the bondage of its physical laws.

Therefore, in order to write a perfect ending for a story you have to twist the laws of cause and effect, reverse black and white, and even possess a power to move in the opposite direction from the rule of the universe. Only a heavenly and chaste soul that can sing carols of praise towards humanity can save the story. To write a story with a perfect ending is a double challenge to the author's body and soul.

Urobuchi Gen had lost that power. It still hasn't recovered. The 'tragedy syndrome' is still continuing within me. Is this a terminal disease? Should I give up on the pure 'warrior of love' that I've longed for? Ascend a pallid battle steed and reincarnate into a dispenser of this virus... Could it be that I can only create pieces that give men courage and hope in my next life? (When I wrote this, I wrote 'courage' as 'lingering ghosts'. Could this be because of using 'ime' - Ah, I wrote 'ime' as 'hatred' -are there no chances of recovery for me?)

Honestly, I even wanted to break my pen. I remember watching Spiderman II. When I saw Peter wishing that he doesn't have the power to change his body, I also thought 'Perhaps, I wish to never write another script again!'

Therefore, I visited my friend Nasu Kinoko's house on the afternoon of the next day and wanted to tell him my true intention. But before I spoke with him about what I've been thinking in my heart, Takashi Takeuchi got ahead of me and started talking. And as soon as he spoke, he brought up an unthought-of proposal.

The parts afterwards are the same as Kinoko's notes. Although the initial plan was just a short piece describing the duel between Kiritsugu and Kirei, the wings of imagination can't be stopped once it is spread opened and finally all seven master’s and their Servants are gathered together. I found myself once again immersed in the joy of weaving together a story. It can be said that the launch of Fate/zero saved my writing career.

Right now, I've writing a piece that is saved and has a perfect ending. To be more accurate, writing a part of this piece.

Yes. This marvelous piece called Fate - it’s perfect united ending surrounding the protagonist Emiya Shirō is a set fact. No matter how cruel

the end of Zero turns out to be, it wouldn't affect the perfect finish of this entire work.

Right now, I've finally got a chance to write a tragic ending according to my heart's desire. No matter how I display the darkness inside my heart, from an overall look I am nevertheless a partner of 'the warrior of love, Nasu Kinoko'.

Oh yeah.

Umm. Although it didn't completely solve my problem, however, to allow me to once again discover 'the self that has the joy of creation' is already a big improvement.

Right now, I'm moving forward step by step. No matter where I end up in the future, I am already very happy at the moment.

According to current projections, Fate/zero should end in four volumes.

At its end, the readers who witness Saber whimpering, will be so overwhelmed by anger and sadness that they will rip the last volume and go impulsively reinstall "Fate/stay night" and then they won’t be able to stop until they watch as Saber gains her salvation. That’s the conclusion I want to write.

Nasu Kinoko

In the world of magecraft, the ‘miracle’ that can fulfil any wish exists.

This vessel is called the Holy Grail, and in order to complete it all the rituals need to be conducted.

Although up till now examples demonstrating its ‘mystery’ have yet to be seen.

But ever since the Holy Grail was born, countless days and lives have already wafted away before it.

Not to mention it’s only been two hundred years.

Fuyuki’s ritual is still quite young. For the ritual’s success, many talented individuals are needed to build the foundations.

Therefore, seven magi and seven Servants gathered here.

The summoned ones gathered here are all nobles harnessing truths beyond the ordinary.

If you regard surpassing them as your goal.

Then, come and prove yourself as the strongest –

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A miracle will only happen on one person, and it's exactly because of this uniqueness that miracles hold such values.

Going ten years back from the time of the game 'Fate/stay night'.

Here, another 'Fate' made by Urobuchi Gen lifted its curtains.

This is Zero. A Heaven's Feel that no one's seen. A story about 'that man' no one's ever mentioned. A magnificent prologue.

… Wait, I originally wanted to get some fame with Zero's brilliance too.

But I gave up when I thought the piece couldn't be too long.

Urobuchi Gen, a distinguished man of both the sword and the pen, who has both a calm and thorough objectivity and elegance in words. The swiftness of his sword can overcome the speed of sound. Also, his ability to control the entire story is of the best quality in the PC game world and has created many outstanding works up till now. He's already an assassin or half-vampire. Should be cannibalism next. His motto is 'hum, this is pretty tasty'. He even thinks of himself as one of the great men of the time.

Firstly, I'd like to express here my joy at having him adapting my work.

A new Fate painted by his hand. I, as the original author, was more deeply moved by its charm than anyone else.

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So, this book talks about the story of the fourth Heaven’s Feel.

The rule in the Fate version Heaven’s Feel is actually rather simple.

1. A battle royale between seven magi and their Servants, acting as familiars.

2. Servants are materialized in Heroic Spirit form, according to an appearance ‘suitable to the era’.

3. Master has three absolute commands of the Servant.

4. The final survivor wins the right to possess the Holy Grail.

That’s how it’s like. Although there are other details, they are branches and leaves whose rules will be established as long as the root and trunk of the tree exists. In fact, it is very simple and basic. Because of that, the kind of story created is completely dependent on the creator’s outrageous imagination. It can be a cruel boy-meets-girl, or a vigorous tangled battle.

Fate/stay night belongs to the former. What about Zero?

Of course, I don’t need to talk about Urobuchi Gen’s true nature. It will definitely be an utterly confused war of communal slaughter.

Those readers who thought Fate/stay night “should have more than blood, tears and tragic endings”, this is for you! This is the true ‘Heaven’s Feel’, with the battle for survival as its essence!

This is Emiya Kiritsugu’s other side that was never mentioned until now and unknown by others.

This is the fourth Heaven’s Feel that’s never been completely described until now.

Be them the magi on the stage or their Servants; they are all boss level characters, and between them a cruel and merciless battle of elimination will be conducted.

Yes. Zero is canon, but at the same time it is another legend different from ‘Fate/stay night’.

If we have to define it, it’s an extra part spin out of canon story. It's a unique leaf of a melody that Urobuchi Gen conducted from a completely

Fate-ish trunk. Here, you don't have to consider the content of the 'Fate/stay night' game. Only move the story according to your wishes, let the characters shown portray themselves to the fullest and rush towards the ending without regret.

That kind of galloping sentiment. I really want to reminiscent the contract interwoven with hope and despair, and wait for the duel between Emiya Kiritsugu and 'that man' in his destiny at the same time,

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The marvelous conclusion of the volume one post face is as follows. Let me talk about behind-the-scenes stories that everyone's rather interested about.

Why would Zero be written by Urobuchi Gen? That is a long story.

The relationship between Urobuchi Gen and Fate can go back to 2002.

I was writing the Fate Saber route at the time and was sent into the hospital near my house due to illnesses. TYPE-MOON was still doujin at the time, and Fate was yet a fledgling draft with four main routes including an Ilya route.

Takeuchi, who thought 'if there's only Nasu doing the work we'll never finish it', asked me: "Is there a writer you think as trustworthy who can write some stories to be inserted into plot?"

With such thoughts, I began to hook Urobuchi Gen with baits such as 'wanna go see a movie together?". Although I was quite happy with Urobuchi's reply "I'll definitely do things that interest me", I still told him "Nah, I was just kidding!". That was because I suddenly realized I always gave up on projects by being like this, and I must see this one through. Maybe Fate will be the last game that is solely written by me. Therefore, I decided to do it myself, and gave up on the plan of seeking his help.

(Later, TYPE-MOON changed from doujin to commercial, therefore ordering Urobuchi's scripts became harder. He was also busy doing other things he likes, so the matter of cooperation was put away.)

Then two years passed. It became the summer of 2004, when Hollow was being developed.

When we were developing Hollow, which had many assistant writers creating the plot together, Takeuchi once again surprised me with his words.

“For Eclipse, should we get Urobuchi Gen to write one?”

It was too surprising. But because my disposition as Urobuchi’s fan was too intense, it was too hard for me to speak such a request; it was like making a demand to a god. I gave the question to Takeuchi in a roundabout way “… Um, if it’s brought up by you, Takeuchi, he might find it pretty hard to refuse…”. Therefore, at one time when we were dining with Urobuchi, Takeuchi said straightforwardly “Urobuchi-san, I’ve got something I want to talk to you about”. That was such a strong direct attack!! As ferocious as a spiral upward hook.

Yes. Spiral upward hook. I think those knowledgeable readers should know about it. Faced with such an attack, this man who often surpassed the reader’s imagination only hummed and nodded slightly and made a clever counter move.

“Ah. If so, what about getting me to write about the fourth Heaven’s Feel? Something like Fate/zero.”

So… impressive!!

Isn’t this just great? To be honest, I even think this is an idea more wonderful that developing the Hollow game.

Then, we began to discuss about it:

“Speaking of, what is the fourth war about?”

“Hum – Saber getting bullied by Gilgamesh and Alexander!”

I answered unceremoniously.

In my mind, there are two main points in the fourth Heaven’s Feel.

One is Saber’s setback.

King Arthur, who ruled her people as the model human. The selfless and devoted, just and uncorrupted Artoria.

The absolute commander who surpassed mortals, the majestic Gilgamesh.

And the extravert king whom some called a tyrant, but still held his belief that he'll bring his people to happiness. The King of Conquerors, Alexander, who ruled the world as a man.

Using the intensive conflict between the three to unravel Saber's story in Zero.

And the other point is Kiritsugu's story. I contracted that to him according to his wishes as well. I don't care about other things anymore.

"I understand. Then I'll do it according to the way I like it to be. Ah, but I'll do my best to get the style of the piece close to Fate."

He is indeed Urobuchi Gen, able to think about TYPE-MOON's clients.

Afterwards, we discussed it over and over. After a few continuous meetups, the draft of volume one was finally completely in the winter of 2004.

Some readers might be surprised that at the time, Hollow was obviously not finished, so why was volume one concluded!?

(Because we were too busy at that time. In 2005 we also began to do a lot of new commercialization. Afterwards, as we sorted out all the personnel the company got back on track again.)

Because of that, Urobuchi-san thought 'Zero is a story based on Fate. So, it's better if Zero doesn't become available to the public before Fate is released.' Therefore, after waiting for a year, it was finally released in the winter of 2006. That's how things went.

The above is Urobuchi-san and Zero's initial encounter.

Although only us creators thought it will be an interesting project at the time, today when the story is approaching its conclusion, I have no doubt Zero will become a piece that everyone who likes Fate are eagerly expecting.

Volume one is the prologue. Then it is the beginning of the war in volume two and the pitched battle and its astonishments in volume three. Lastly, there is the utterly despairing volume four (currently being written). Please enjoy the joy of Fate that Urobuchi is bringing to us all.

Oh, no. Maybe Urobuchi's Heaven's Feel is indeed the true Hell.